

US Border Patrol agent executes Guatemalan woman

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US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is seeking to whitewash the extrajudicial execution of an unarmed Guatemalan woman by a Border Patrol agent on Wednesday, in the Texas border town of Rio Bravo, 15 miles southeast of Laredo.

The woman, identified as 20-year-old Claudia Patricia Gomez Gonzalez, left her home town of San Juan Ostuncalco, Guatemala, more than two weeks before in the hope of joining her boyfriend and finding work in Virginia. She was traveling through Rio Bravo as part of a group of Central American migrants who had just made the treacherous journey across the Rio Grande and into the United States without immigration documents, when they were confronted by an as yet unidentified Border Patrol agent at about 12:30 p.m. local time.

Under circumstances that remain unexplained, the agent fired a single shot from his handgun into the back of Gomez's head, killing her instantly.

CBP has since given multiple accounts attempting to justify the agent's actions. An initial statement issued by the agency claimed that one of its agents was investigating reports of "illegal activity" in the town when he was attacked by immigrants wielding "blunt objects," later identified as two-by-four pieces of lumber. In response, the agent "fatally wounded one of the assailants."

Two days later, on Friday, CBP released another statement making no mention of any objects used to attack the agent, but instead claiming that the officer commanded the immigrants to "get on the ground," but "the group ignored his verbal commands and instead rushed the officer." In this latest version of events, CBP no longer claims that the victim was an "assailant," but merely a "member of the group." The three men traveling with Gonzalez were apprehended and may be

deported before they can provide statements or testify in the event that charges are ultimately brought against the agent.

CBP has refused to comment further on the incident and canceled a press conference scheduled for Friday. The agent has been placed on administrative leave while the killing is investigated by the FBI and the Texas Rangers.

Marta Martinez told the *Los Angeles Times* that she was inside her house at the time of the shooting and ran outside upon hearing the gunshot. When she emerged, she saw a woman lying face-down on the ground, her head covered in blood, and a uniformed Border Patrol agent standing over her, gun in hand. In a video broadcast on Facebook Live, an officer can be seen flipping the woman's body over and performing chest compressions, though it is apparent the woman is dead.

Martinez said she watched as an agent captured two men who had tried to run away and heard him telling the men in reference to their murdered companion, "This is what happens. You see? Look what happened." Martinez also heard the agent telling the men, "Be quiet, you have weapons" in an apparent attempt to justify the shooting.

She noted that although she did not witness what happened prior to the shooting, "There was no weapon. They were hiding."

In a statement Friday, Guatemala's secretary of the National Council for Migrant Assistance, Carlos Narez, called for an "exhaustive, impartial investigation" and made an impotent plea for the US to observe international human rights law, saying: "Guatemala is saddened by whatever violence and excess use of force was used by the Border Patrol and calls to respect, at all times, all the rights of our people and whomever may be held by immigration, especially with respect to life."

In a Friday interview with the news channel Guatevision, Claudia's mother, Lidia Gonzalez Viquez, said that her daughter had earned a degree in accounting but was unable to find work for the past two years. "She left home 15 days ago, saying, 'Mamita, we're going to go on ahead. There's no work here.' But shamefully, they killed her. US immigration police killed her."

At a Friday press conference, Claudia's aunt, Dominga Vicente, denounced her niece's killing and the anti-immigrant policies of the US government. She said: "We want justice to be done and for her murderer to pay with prison... I think it is the [US] government that is giving these orders. This isn't the first person to be dying in the country. They have treated them like animals and it is not the way people should be treated. I ask that the authorities and institutions hand down a punishment or that attention is called to the US government so that they will no longer treat us like animals."

This is an apparent reference to Trump's recent tirade against immigrants, whom he referred to as "animals" and "rapists." Trump has used such fascist rhetoric to whip up an anti-immigrant atmosphere and incite violence against immigrant communities in conjunction with an escalating campaign of state terror waged by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and CBP agents. In effect, the administration has given the more than 21,000 Border Patrol agents a blank check to stop the flow of immigrants into the United by whatever means necessary.

Karina Alvarez of the Laredo Immigrant Alliance told the *Los Angeles Times*, "We've been seeing a lot more Border Patrol because of all this anti-immigrant narrative that's going on," noting the effect of Trump's description of migrants as "animals and rapists and murderers" on the attitudes and behavior of Border Patrol agents. She continued: "That is ultimately how they see us. We see that in this, and this is not an isolated case. This has happened before. The exception in this case is that it was videotaped."

This is just the latest in a series of killings by Border Patrol agents in recent years, most of which go largely unreported. Last November, a Border Patrol agent shot and killed a man he claimed had tried to grab his gun, though this claim was never substantiated.

In April, Border Patrol officer Lonnie Swartz was

acquitted of murder in connection with the 2012 cross-border shooting death of 16-year-old Mexican citizen Antonio Elena Rodriguez, despite the incident being captured on video. The boy was allegedly throwing rocks at Swartz, who was behind a 20-foot-high elevated fence. The agent shot Rodriguez in the back 10 times.

The Democrats have largely dropped even the pretense of defending immigrants against the attack being carried out by the Trump administration. They have consistently voted to increase the number of Border Patrol agents and provide funds for border fencing, drone surveillance and other "border security" measures that force desperate migrants into ever more dangerous routes to the US border. Though there is no reliable source of data, it is estimated that at least 10,000 people have died trying to cross the southern US border since 1994.

The summary execution of Claudia Gonzalez at the hands of the Border Patrol underscores the need for an independent working class struggle for the right of all workers to live and work where they choose with full legal and citizenship rights.



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