

US Border Patrol execution of undocumented Guatemalan woman sparks anger and nationwide protests

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Last week, thousands of people demonstrated in cities throughout the United States and internationally against the anti-immigrant policies of the Trump administration. They demanded justice for 19-year-old undocumented migrant Claudia Gomez Gonzalez, who was summarily executed by a US Border Patrol agent in the border town of Rio Bravo near Laredo, Texas, on May 23.

The largest of the demonstrations, organized by a coalition of labor, immigrant rights, and civil liberties groups under the name “Families Belong Together,” were held Friday in more than 20 cities across the US and in Barcelona, Spain, in opposition to the Trump administration’s policy of separating undocumented migrant children from their parents.

This cruel policy—which was first employed under President George W. Bush and continued under President Barack Obama, though never made official policy until this year—forces children to live with relatives or unrelated foster families, sometimes hundreds of miles from the detention camps where their parents are held as they await prosecution and deportation for the so-called crime of “illegal entry.” The threat of having one’s family torn apart is designed to act as a deterrent against entry by those fleeing the violence and economic devastation that US imperialist intervention and domination has produced in much of Latin America.

During just two weeks in May, 658 children were removed from their families under the program. According to a recent report by the American Civil Liberties Union, the Department of Health and Human Services has lost track of nearly 1,500 immigrant children after separating them from their families and

resettling them with foster families.

The family separation policy was first publicly announced in early May by Attorney General Jeff Sessions during a xenophobic speech in Arizona, in which he proclaimed: “If you are smuggling a child, then we will prosecute you, and that child will be separated from you as required by law. If you don’t like that, then don’t smuggle children across our border.”

On Friday, around 400 people assembled outside the Department of Justice headquarters in Washington, D.C. to demand an end to the family separations and justice for Gonzalez and others killed by US immigration agencies.

At a Wednesday rally in New York City’s Foley Square, protesters condemned the deaths of Gomez and Roxsana Hernandez, a 33-year-old Honduran migrant who died in an ICE detention center last week under circumstances that have yet to be explained.

“Her [Gonzalez] only crime was to have a better life for her and her family. This is a hard time for immigrants. This is a time when the president calls us criminals and animals,” immigrant rights advocate Blanca Saavedra, who helped organize the Foley Square rally, told *AM New York*.

Claudia Gomez Gonzalez left her home town of San Juan Ostuncalco, Guatemala, in the hope of finding work and joining her boyfriend in Alexandria, Virginia. Just minutes after making the treacherous journey across the Rio Grande on May 23, however, she and her three companions were confronted by a Border Patrol agent whose name has still not been made public.

While the precise sequence of events remains unclear, the encounter ended with the agent firing a single shot

from his handgun into Claudia’s head at close range, consistent with an execution-style murder.

US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) released a statement claiming that the officer had been investigating reports of “illegal activity” in the town when he came under attack by a group of immigrants wielding “blunt objects,” later described by CBP officials as two-by-four pieces of lumber. The agency said that during the assault, the officer “fatally wounded one of the assailants.”

Two days later, CBP released a second statement in which no mention of any “blunt objects” was made, instead claiming that the officer had ordered the immigrants to “get on the ground” multiple times but “the group ignored his verbal commands and rushed the officer.” In this second version of events, Claudia is characterized as a “member of the group” rather than “one of the assailants,” which amounts to an admission that she had not taken part in any supposed “attack” on the officer.

Hundreds of smaller vigils and rallies took place in Oakland, San Antonio, Salt Lake City, Seattle and other US cities throughout the week to condemn the execution of Gonzalez and in defense of immigrant rights, which have come under an unprecedented assault by the Trump administration.

The widespread public opposition to Trump’s anti-immigrant policies evident in these actions stands in sharp contrast to the silent complicity of the Democratic Party, which has consistently supported the hiring of more Border Patrol agents and increased funding for “border security” measures.



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