

Mexican police shoot and kill 26-year-old immigrant as repression intensifies along Mexico-Guatemala border

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The US government's decision to deploy the military against thousands of migrants and refugees from Central America has not dissuaded Central Americans from continuing their journey north. Many new caravans have formed in recent days as workers and peasants desperately seek to escape the region ravaged by a century of imperialist war and exploitation.

One young man, Henry Adalid Díaz Reyes, was shot in the head with a rubber bullet yesterday by Mexican police. The Honduran, who was 26 years old, died en route to a hospital.

Several reports from US officials indicate that the Pentagon is preparing to send over 5,000 troops to the US-Mexico border after Donald Trump called the migrant wave an "invasion." Equipment is already being sent, while contingents of the Customs and Border Patrol with full anti-riot gear, helicopters and high-caliber weapons have been temporarily halting traffic at the port of entry between Ciudad Juárez and El Paso for daily test runs to confront the caravan.

Moreover, it's expected that Trump will announce Tuesday a set of measures against migrants and refugees, all seemingly illegal under international and US federal law. Officials who spoke anonymously to the *New York Times* indicate that Trump plans to proclaim the caravan a "national emergency," place a blanket travel ban against Hondurans, Salvadorans and Guatemalans for bogus "national security" reasons, bar asylum requests by migrants from the region, and cut aid to these countries.

Despite the US threats and the militarized operations by the Guatemalan and Mexican governments, Central American migrants continue to leave in the hundreds and thousands.

This continuous exodus is an irrefutable demonstration of the intolerable living conditions for the bulk of the 30 million people that live in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Workers, peasants and youth in the region only see a future of hunger, unemployment, gang and state violence, lack of access to basic services, official neglect and devastation after fierce hurricanes and storms, and largely non-existent democratic rights.

A young Honduran who scrapes by as a bricklayer and works at an NGO against violence in the town of Comayagüela spoke

anonymously to the Costa Rican *Nación*:

"There is an environment in which people want to leave the country because everything going on is a blow against the people. Many are feeling asphyxiated because they spend years without a job, and staple goods are getting more expensive. Many say that since they are already expected to die in Honduras, it's better to just go to die somewhere else," he noted.

On Sunday, about three hundred migrants left El Salvador after organizing on Facebook and WhatsApp to travel together to the United States. They entered successfully into Guatemala yesterday morning.

During the weekend, the second major caravan that has left Honduras this month reached the border between Guatemala and Mexico. Several of its participants said they hoped to catch up with the main caravan that is currently about 200 miles north.

In a repetition of what occurred eight days before with the first caravan, the 2,000 migrants broke through a fence and a small group of police on the Guatemalan side only to be quickly bombarded with tear gas from the Mexican federal police. Several migrants, including elderly and children, were overcome by the gas and had to be sent to the hospital, including a 4-month-old baby.

Dozens of angry, young migrants responded by throwing rocks, other objects and reportedly one Molotov cocktail against the tear-gas canisters and rubber bullets from the Mexican police.

About three dozen migrants and a handful of police were injured. Alongside the deceased Henry Díaz, another man received third degree burns when a tear-gas canister was shot at his genitals. There is another report of a third migrant injured from a firearm. The Mexican government insists that officials didn't carry weapons either for live or rubber ammunition.

On Monday morning, about 600 migrants decided to risk crossing the river Suchiate under the port of entry, while boats with navy troops sought to intimidate them and a police helicopter flew within a few feet from the river to generate waves, which almost washed away entire families—fatigued, dehydrated and hungry—along with journalists.

The Mexican police stopped them at the shore and held them there for about three hours until they were forced to form lines to march to the port of entry in order to apply for asylum and be sent to a detention “shelter,” all under a heavy police presence.

About 2,000 migrants stayed at the border town in Guatemala to wait for larger numbers before crossing.

On Friday, Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto offered “temporary” work permits for migrants who apply for asylum inside of the southern states of Chiapas and Oaxaca, that is, before they reach Mexico City.

However, the approximately 2,000 migrants who have agreed to apply for asylum in Mexico and stay at “shelters” have been sent to what is now widely recognized as a detention center guarded by the federal police and the Navy in Tapachula, Chiapas. Journalists are not being allowed to enter and family members can’t communicate with the inmates.

The National Immigration Institute (INM) announced Monday that six other detention facilities are being prepared for more migrants.

Brisa Ochoa from the Fray Matías Human Rights Center in Tapachula warned *El Proceso* that the migrants “are being detained arbitrarily.” In short, promises that the migrants can submit their asylum applications and then travel and work freely in Mexico while being processed are lies. What is taking place is that the Mexican authorities are responding to the caravans by rapidly accelerated the building of an enormous web for mass detention and deportations along the Guatemala-Mexico border.

Since the Obama and Peña Nieto administrations set up the Southern Border Plan in July 2014, the US and Mexican governments have invested hundreds of millions of dollars to block migrants from Central America. Over 750,000 Central Americans have been detained and 658,000 deported by the Peña Nieto administration.

A report published by Amnesty International earlier this year found that Mexico is deporting Central American immigrants illegally “with thousands being ignored and forced back year after year” despite reporting credible fear of persecution and threats to their lives and human rights.

In August, a US Congressional Research Service report on the Southern Border Program noted, “Mexico has established 12 naval bases on the country’s [southern] rivers, three security cordons stretching more than 100 miles north of the Mexico-Guatemala and Mexico-Belize borders, and a drone surveillance program.”

Yesterday, a group of 29 migrants detained by the police in Pijijiapan even set fire to their mattresses in a local detention center for migrants, clearly as a desperate distress signal. They were sent to the Tapachula “shelter.”

On Friday, the six thousand migrants still at the head of the main caravan gathered into a mass assembly at the central plaza of Arriaga, Chiapas, to discuss Peña Nieto’s proposal. Pro-immigrant activists and caravan participants noted that existing

laws already should provide for the temporary protections offered but they are simply not followed, and that the intention of the government is to put the brake on the mass exodus behind them.

They voted by show of hands to continue the trip north. Large sectors of the caravan expressed interest in discussing the proposal made by Mexican president elect, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who has made vague promises of visas for Central Americans.

The warning must be made that López Obrador’s main concern is appeasing the Trump administration by discouraging further migration northward from Central America. After betraying all of his major campaign promises—from revoking the privatization of the energy industry and the regressive education “reform” to removing the military from Mexican streets—the incoming president’s words are as empty and deceitful as those coming from Peña Nieto.

On Saturday, about 100 Mexican gendarmes in riot gear stopped the caravan for three hours to try to force the migrants to take Peña Nieto’s offer before they left the state of Chiapas.

More perniciously, adopting the methods of death squads, IMN officials have been driving vans with tinted windows before dawn to pick up individual migrants or small groups, as was reported in videos by neighbors in Arriaga.

In Huixtla, last Tuesday, the municipality decided to fumigate the streets, presumably against disease-carrying mosquitos, the one night when thousands of families with children, elderly and pregnant women were trying to rest. Terrified migrants noted that they received no warning or even an explanation of what chemicals they were being drenched with.

After long discussions among caravan members about each new obstacle and provocation, they voted in another mass assembly on Sunday to form a 300-strong and unarmed security commission, a cleaning commission and a communications group.

While the government escalates the repression, the response by ordinary Mexicans has been the opposite. As the main caravan approached Oaxaca, a banner hanging from an overpass said, “Your hearts are brave, don’t give up.” Mexicans are now humorously joking to their partners, “Darling, if you don’t treat me right, I’ll leave with the caravan,” while children ask their parents if “we can go with them.” The encouragement and material support given by Mexican workers and peasants has demonstrated a profound empathy and class solidarity.



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