Trump lowers cap on refugees to record low of 18,000

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The US State Department announced Thursday that President Donald Trump has decided to reduce the limit on the admission of refugees in the fiscal year beginning October 1 to 18,000, a record low since the modern refugee program began in 1980.

This represents a reduction of almost a half from the already minimal current limit of 30,000, itself a mere fraction of the 110,000 limit set by Obama in 2016, his final year in office. Trump has slashed the refugee cap for three straight years since taking office in January of 2017.

Obama, who oversaw more immigrant deportations than all previous presidents, raised the limit on legal refugees in part to drum up votes from Hispanics for the Hillary Clinton presidential campaign. Trump is gutting the program in order to mobilize his far-right anti-immigrant supporters by further expanding his war on refugees beyond so-called "illegals" to those admitted to the US legally.

Virtually all of the 18,000 slots have already been allocated. Administration officials told reporters it is reserving 4,000 positions for Iraqis who worked with the US military, 5,000 for people suffering religious persecution and 1,500 for people from Central America. The remaining 7,500 openings are reserved for those seeking family reunification who have been cleared for resettlement in the US.

This latest move tightens the virtual ban on people fleeing poverty, violence and persecution around the world, largely the result of US imperialist wars, CIA coups and Washington's promotion of dictatorial regimes. Until Trump took office, the US was the leading destination in the world for refugees. Last year it admitted fewer refugees than Canada. More than 100,000 refugees are currently on a referral list for possible resettlement in the US.

Also on Thursday, Trump issued an executive order to allow states and localities to opt out of the refugee program and refuse to accept people permitted to resettle in the US.

The same day, Matthew Albence, the acting director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), held a White House press conference at which he denounced states and localities that limit or bar officials from helping ICE detain and deport immigrants. He particularly attacked jurisdictions that refuse to allow ICE to arrest immigrants inside state prisons and local jails.

Threatening so-called "sanctuary" cities and states, Albence said, "You may be the first we're calling out, but you won't be the last."

Defending the move by Trump, who has sole authority over the number of legal refugees admitted, the State Department said in a news release Thursday: "The current burdens on the US immigration system must be alleviated before it is again possible to resettle large numbers of refugees. Prioritizing the humanitarian protection cases of those already in our country is simply a matter of fairness and common sense."

The claim that slamming the door on legal refugees is motivated by a desire to prioritize "the humanitarian protection" of refugees already in the US is a transparent lie. The administration's mass incarceration of undocumented workers, including thousands of children torn from their parents, its development of a network of concentration camps for immigrants, its Gestapo-style workplace raids and mass roundups of immigrant workers, its threats of anti-immigrant sweeps in major cities and its de facto ban on asylum seekers from Central America have evoked outrage and revulsion across the US and internationally.

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This policy is directed by anti-immigrant fanatics who have been placed in charge of agencies such as ICE, Customs and Border Protection, and Citizenship and Immigration Services, and fascists who occupy top positions in the White House, including Trump's immigration adviser Stephen Miller and the president himself.

The latest attack comes as a record 350,000 people are expected to seek asylum in the US in the coming year. Just last week, on September 20, the administration announced a deal with El Salvador to halt the flow of immigrants from that country to the US. It follows agreements with Guatemala and Honduras to declare Central America's Northern Triangle nations—among the most impoverished, repressive and violent in the world—"safe third countries."

As a result, men, women and children fleeing terror gangs and government death squads will be required to apply for asylum in these countries rather than travel through them to reach the US. Many thousands of people will die as a result. The policy will also allow the US to ship more asylum seekers already in the US back to Central America and Mexico to be held indefinitely in filthy and unsafe detention camps.

Also this month, the US Supreme Court ruled, with the votes of two Democratic-appointed justices, to overturn lower court rulings suspending Trump's illegal curbs on asylum rights until the legal issues involved in suits against the actions are adjudicated.

In addition, the inspector general of the Department of Health and Human Services issued a report earlier this month documenting the abusive treatment of immigrant children in Trump's detention camps.

Betsy Fisher of the International Refugee Assistance Project called the new cap on refugees a "shockingly low refugee admissions goal." She said the policy "will all but ensure that people in need of safety will be left in dangerous conditions."

Ryan Mace of Amnesty International USA said, "To cut the number of refugees the US will accept to this low of a number reflects nothing more than this administration's attempts to further hate, division and prejudice in a country that once valued dignity, equality and fairness."

The combination of indifference and support that characterizes the Democrats' real attitude to Trump's war on immigrants was reflected in the virtual silence that greeted the announcement from Democratic politicians and the bulk of the corporate media. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez did not bother even to issue a statement or post a tweet in opposition, as she and the rest of her party were consumed by the impeachment inquiry being made on the grounds that Trump's dealings with Ukraine jeopardize US national security and play into the hands of Russia.

Major press outlets allied with the Democrats, including the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, have thus far buried the story on their inside pages and the news channels have barely reported it.

Far from opposing the refugee cut, the Democrats joined with the Republicans in the Senate to pass by a vote of 82 to 15 a continuing resolution to continue funding the federal government, including Trump's immigrant detention camps and border troops and police, through November 21. The Senate vote followed a 301–123 vote for the bill earlier this month in the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives. Trump is expected to sign the measure before the beginning of the new fiscal year on Tuesday.

This follows the de facto compliance by the Democrats with Trump's declaration of a border emergency and illegal use of Pentagon funds to build his border war, and the votes by House and Senate Democrats in June to give Trump an additional $4.6 billion to operate his concentration camps for immigrants and carry out his policy of mass terror against undocumented workers.

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