

Denied US entry, asylum seeker takes his own life on US-Mexico border bridge

Norisa Diaz
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On Wednesday, Jesús García Serna, a Mexican asylum-seeker in his 30s, slit his own throat after being denied entry into the United States on a bridge across the Rio Grande. He collapsed and died just a few yards away from the international dividing line.

Garcia Serna had been prevented entry to the US at the Pharr–Reynosa International Bridge between the Mexican border city of Reynosa and Pharr, Texas.

A video from a security camera shows the man, dressed in a blue shirt, approaching US officials on the bridge and raising a hand to his neck. Mexican officials later provided photos that show the man’s body lying in a pool of blood with his throat cut.

The tragic scene that unfolded on Washington’s doorstep is a glimpse into the horrors faced by millions who fleeing their homes in desperation only to be met with walls, barbed wire, and drones, and a brutal immigration system that has turned international asylum law into a dead letter.

The primarily Central American migrants who are fleeing gang violence and extortion are part of a larger refugee crisis that spans the world over. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 70.8 million people have been displaced worldwide due to war, gang violence, extreme poverty, and climate change.

While the majority of migrants applying for asylum at the US-Mexico border are from the Northern Triangle countries of Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, a significant share come from Mexico, where homicides have reached record levels during the last two years.

In the past year, more than 60,000 asylum seekers have been pushed back into Mexico as part of a Trump administration scheme called the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) project, also known as Remain in Mexico. Mexican nationals are not subject to MPP but

are still forced to wait indefinitely for claims to be heard through a policy known as metering.

The tragedy on the Pharr-Reynosa bridge was not the first of its kind. In 2017, Guadalupe Olivas Valencia, a 45-year-old Mexican migrant, jumped to his death in Tijuana, Mexico less than an hour after being deported from the United States. Olivas Valencia had worked for years as a gardener in California to support his three children back in Mexico. He took his life in despair after suffering the arduous journey for the third time to reach his family.

Wednesday’s suicide casts light on the dire conditions facing the migrants being turned away from the US southern border and the dangers that they face in being forced to wait on the Mexican side of the border or returned to Central America.

Last month the advocacy group Human Rights First noted that Trump has exposed asylum seekers to “life-threatening dangers” after documenting 636 cases of “rape, kidnapping, torture, and other violent attacks against asylum seekers and migrants returned to Mexico under MPP.” A study by the US Immigration Policy Center at UC San Diego found that one in four people sent back under MPP were threatened with physical violence.

Among the many victims of violence documented was a nine-year-old disabled girl and her mother, who were both kidnapped and raped after being deported back to Tijuana.

Washington’s immigration policies, which have been escalating exponentially since the Clinton administration in the 1990s, have produced no shortage of tragedies. The group Border Angels estimates that since 1994, about 10,000 people have died in their attempts to cross the border.

Building off the policies pursued under Obama, the

Trump administration has been pursuing escalated brute force along the southern border as well as extralegal means to undermine the right of asylum under international law, which guarantees safe harbor to any and all who seek asylum, regardless of whether they are eventually granted residency through legal proceedings.

The entire framework of the assault on the right to asylum in the US is for the purpose of preventing immigrants from ever obtaining it, no matter the dangers which confront them at home.

In the last year Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) agents have replaced US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) asylum officers to conduct “credible fear” interviews. If a claim is deemed “credible” a migrant is allowed to present their asylum case before an immigration judge. Trump has made clear that CBP agents will approve far fewer “credible fear” interviews than USCIS asylum officers.

A report published this last year by ProPublica revealed that a Facebook group with over 9,500 US Border Patrol agents as members featured sadistic, violent and racist jokes about immigrant deaths. It will be noted in the future history books that an especially cruel and sadistic feature of Trump’s anti-immigrant policy was the fact that this modern Gestapo has been placed in charge of “credible fear” interviews.

As border security has tightened and most asylum claims continue to be rejected, conditions in the sprawling network of prison detention camps remain inhumane and akin to torture, having led to the deaths of dozens of migrants, including children.

Carlos Gregorio Hernandez Vasquez, a 16-year-old Guatemalan migrant, was the sixth to die in a Customs Border Protection (CBP) facility in less than a year. During the weeks of Christmas and New Year’s, three African migrants died while in the custody of two divisions of the US Department of Homeland Security.

While the Democrats attempt to portray Trump as the only president to oversee “child separations,” the fact of the matter is that there have been countless separations of parents and children throughout the administrations of Democrats and Republican alike. Obama still holds the title of “Deporter-in-Chief” with over 3 million people deported under his presidency.

Last year, Heydi Gámez García, a 13-year-old Honduran child living with family in New York,

attempted suicide in despair after her father had failed a third crossing attempt and was apprehended. Her only parent, Manuel Gámez had initially been separated from his children after being deported under Obama. Gámez García was hospitalized but died shortly after being taken off life support.



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