Pregnant migrant teenager dies after falling from US border wall in southern Texas

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Last Tuesday, a 19-year-old teenager, who was nearly 30 weeks pregnant, died as a result of a fall from the border wall while attempting to cross into the United States.

The young woman, identified as Miriam Estefany Girón Luna from Guatemala, fell nearly 20 feet as she attempted to scale the steel mesh border wall near Clint, Texas earlier this month. Her partner, Dilver Israel Díaz García, 26, carried her away from the scene and reached out to Border Patrol agents, who in turn took her to the nearest medical facilities. According to reports from the Guatemalan consular officials, despite multiple surgeries, neither Girón Luna nor her child could be saved.

As expected, US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials who announced the death tried to blame it on the activities of "human smugglers… [at whose hands] sadly more lives have perished." In a conference call with reporters, CBP acting commissioner Mark Morgan described Girón Luna's fatal fall in detail, calling it "an example of the truth" of what's occurring at the border.

"The smugglers quickly left them alone, fading off in the darkness, leaving them to make the final legs of the journey by themselves. As they attempted to climb the wall, the husband could do nothing but watch as he saw his pregnant wife fall to the ground."

El Paso Sector Chief Gloria Chavez said in a statement "Someone in Mexico guided this eight-month pregnant woman from Guatemala to this section of the border and encouraged her and helped her climb the steel mesh border barrier. We will engage our law enforcement partners in Mexico to find those responsible for placing these lives in danger."

If one wanted to truly find "those responsible for placing [the lives of migrants] in danger," they wouldn't need to look too far. This tragedy is the latest in the long list of horrific and avoidable human casualties that can be directly traced to the criminal anti-immigrant policies of the Trump administration.

Human trafficking of migrants is but the most visible effect of the set of coordinated policies that have been put into place by the current administration over the past few years. From family separations at the border to the building of a network of detention camps to outright denial of asylum rights, the US government has made it virtually impossible for migrants, particularly from Central America, to find refuge in the United States in a safe manner. Add to that, the vast amount of resources that have been spent on militarizing the border and rebuilding sections of the border wall, including 135 miles of new 30-foot-tall bollard fencing, the result being a perfect recipe for disaster.

Tekandi Paniagua, a Guatemalan consular official based in Texas, told the *Washington Post* that the deaths of Girón Luna and her child reflect an extremely troubling trend with more and more migrants attempting to scale the border wall either by themselves or falling prey to human traffickers, who offer them no option but to scale the wall using unsecured, improvised ladders. Since October, at least five other Guatemalans have suffered broken bones and more serious injuries as a result of falls from the wall. Since January, authorities have intercepted seven tractor trailers filled with migrants. As comparison, in 2019 there were a total of 12 such interceptions.

As Paniagua pointed out, a year ago Girón Luna and her partner would have come to the border and turned themselves in to officials, seeking asylum. This is however no longer possible, given the Trump administration's policy of complete denial of asylum rights at the Southern border. As a result, desperate

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working class migrants are willing to take even greater risks to escape brutal conditions in their home countries, and make their way into the United States. Under these circumstances, tragedies like the deaths of Girón Luna and her child are horrifyingly becoming more and more common.

The Trump administration has amply revealed its callous disregard for any humanitarian concerns or for that matter, truth, while dealing with immigrants. In October 2018, the President declared a "national emergency" to send 5000 troops to the Southern border, claiming without any evidence that a caravan of asylum-seekers headed towards the US posed a threat because it included "stone-cold killers" and "unknown Middle Easterners."

In the past month, it was reported that 160 soldiers deployed at the border are forming "crisis response teams" at two points of entry, with the designated task of "providing force protection for CBP personnel as they perform their federal functions."

Just last week, a criminal complaint filed in a New Mexico Federal court revealed that some of these troops have been surveilling movements of migrants and coordinating with Border Patrol to help capture them. This is in direct violation of the Posse Comitatus Act, passed after the Civil War, which makes it illegal for the military to act as police or engage in "direct civilian law enforcement assistance." However, these proscriptions can be overturned under certain conditions including that of a "national emergency."

In the past week, a new national emergency has been declared to deal with the coronavirus pandemic. It is worth noting that this crisis has only brought into sharper relief the xenophobia that shapes the policies of the Trump administration. The grotesque attempts to frame the crisis as a foreign attack, and to designate the virus itself as "foreign" or "Chinese" are not particularly surprising.

One of the earliest Presidential tweets about the pandemic was just one line: "We need the Wall more than ever." While simple, it made no sense at all given that there was no evidence that an expanded wall would prevent the spread of COVID-19, or for that matter that the coronavirus had made its way into the US from the Southern border. In fact, at that point, Mexico had far fewer confirmed cases of the coronavirus than the US. However, this is a stark reminder of the priorities of this administration and its willingness to use any crisis as an opportunity to push through its anti-immigrant agenda.

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