

Thousands of migrant children remain detained in overflowing detention camps along southern US border

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1 April 2021

As of Tuesday, 4,100 migrants, most of whom are unaccompanied children, were being held in a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) holding facility in Donna, Texas that only has a capacity for 250 people. The conditions, which have been exposed by a recent visit by reporters sanctioned by the Biden administration, can only be described as a crime against humanity.

Images of children lying side by side under foil blankets with only inches between them could be seen in a video taken within the camp. Children are being kept in eight “pods” consisting of 500 children each, crowded into cages lined with see-through plastic sheets. The pods only measure around 3,200 square feet and are housed in tents on hard floors with some mattresses. For reference, the average single-family home in the United States in 2019 was 2,301 square feet, according to the Census Bureau.

Children, who are 14 years and older, are processed in an intake building, fingerprinted, photos taken, and then moved to another room where they are given notices to appear for immigration court. No testing for COVID-19 is being done in the camps except on symptomatic individuals.

Illustrating the dire conditions in the camps, all shoelaces were removed by prison officials from child detainees in order to prevent self-harm, as is practiced regularly in US adult prisons. Immigrant advocates have said that there is no adequate access to soap or food.

The horrific images emerging from the camps set up along the US-Mexico border come following the Biden administration’s preparations for the escalation of deportations, utilizing “Title 42” rules to claim concern for public health to push immigrants back south of the border. A DHS spokesman told the website Axios that the DHS is “working with our partners in Mexico to increase their capacity.” DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas

declared on March 21 that the “border is closed.”

The first pictures from inside the camps during the Biden administration were leaked on March 22 following a visit by Texas Representative Henry Cuellar to the Donna camp. Only recently did the Biden administration allow reporters into one of the camps following growing public anger over its mistreatment and massive detention of immigrants.

When Chuck Todd of NBC’s “Meet the Press” directly asked Mayorkas whether there was a block on media accessing DHS facilities, Mayorkas denied it, claiming, “We are also working on providing access so the American public can in a safe way, without jeopardizing our operations, see what is going on. We’re working on that.”

More than a week later just two journalists from the Associated Press and one TV crew from CBS have been let in to tour the facility. When Mayorkas speaks of reporters “jeopardizing” DHS “operations,” he is speaking of the exposure of the systematic imprisonment and deportation of men, women and children fleeing poverty, war and dictatorship, much of which comes as a direct result of US imperialism’s operations in South and Central American countries pursued through Democratic and Republican administrations.

As of March 31, US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) was holding 5,100 unaccompanied minors, more than the 3,200 it was holding on March 11 and 25 percent higher than at the peak of the Trump administration’s 2019 crackdown on immigrant children. A DHS official told CNN on March 9 that the Donna facility was already “significantly crowded” and that “The number of kids is alarming and concerning and not good at all.”

The detention centers are by law only permitted to detain children for 72 hours, after which they are required

to be transferred to the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement. Yet, in practice, these facilities are holding children for far longer in blatant violation of the law. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reported that at least 5,000 children were detained beyond this period.

In February alone nearly 100,000 immigrants were detained, with 70,000 of those being deported by the Biden administration citing health concerns over COVID-19. Given the administration's record of forcing open schools, just as in overcrowding the camps, against the express warnings of epidemiologists and scientists, the claim of concern over COVID-19 to deport immigrants is blatantly fraudulent.

Officials from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have said that the migrant detention camps can stay open at 100 percent capacity, much like their endorsement of the school reopening campaign, saying they can remain reopen "at any level of community transmission." This is a politically motivated lie and an attempt to give a scientific veneer to an irrational and homicidal policy. Schools have become the leading location for confirmed outbreaks, and the detention centers are certainly playing a similar role in spreading COVID-19.

The Donna, Texas facility, which used to be a barracks for oil workers, was converted to a migrant detention center under the Trump administration and was deactivated after public pressure and protests. It was only recently reactivated by the Biden administration following the rise in detentions at the border.

By any measure of human decency these concentration camps should be shut down and refugees be allotted adequate housing to preserve public health, their own well-being and human dignity.



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