

War on migrants intensifies in Mexico as Biden administration prepares renewed assault on asylum rights

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Human Rights Watch has voiced deep concern about discussions between the Mexican government and the Biden administration on a proposed escalation of the assault on the rights of migrants and refugees.

In a January 18 letter to Mexico's President Andres Manuel López Obrador and Foreign Minister Alicia Bárcen, the NGO urges the Mexican government "to make a clear and public declaration that it will not agree to participate in any new migration management arrangement with the United States ... that will lead to an increase in the expulsions of migrants or limit access to international protection."

As part of the 2024 US federal budget negotiations, Biden and the US Congress are considering changes to immigration policy that would effectively end the right to seek asylum in the US, contravening international and national law. The policy change is a direct assault on the rights of international workers fleeing unlivable conditions, which are the direct result of over a century of imperialist oppression.

Several changes are included in bill H.R. 2, sponsored by Rep. Mario Díaz-Balart (R-Florida) and introduced on May 2, 2023. This expansive proposal now under consideration by Congress aims to restart border wall construction and defund NGOs that provide essential services to migrants. The bill proposes to severely limit asylum access for most migrants traveling through Mexico to the US border.

The bill undermines some of the most fundamental stipulations in immigration policy that govern the conditions under which children can legally be held in US immigration detention, rolling back existing safeguards for migrant children. States will be barred from setting licensing requirements for immigration detention facilities holding children or families, clearing the way for

unfettered brutality and abuse.

It is also reported that the Biden administration has agreed to support the creation of a new border expulsion law, effectively reviving the Trump-era Title 42, which used the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse to expel hundreds of thousands of migrants to Mexico. The new rule will allow officials to expel migrants without asylum screenings.

While the letter highlights the complicity of the López Obrador administration in the US-led war on migrants and the threat of this crackdown's relentless descent into barbarism, it will fall on deaf ears.

During the first five years of his six-year term, López Obrador (known as AMLO) has been a loyal junior partner to the US in the war on migrants.

Among the first actions of his cabinet, then Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard proposed the implementation of what he called a "Marshall Plan" for the Central American "Northern Triangle" (El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala). Under this plan, Mexico would absorb a large part of Central American emigration in exchange for additional US loans, a boon to finance capital. Characterized as a "brake on illegal immigration," it resulted in the implementation on January 25, 2019 of the misleadingly named Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) program.

During the first two years of the program, informally known as "Remain in Mexico," the AMLO administration received more than 71,000 returned asylum seekers, including tens of thousands of children. The policy, charged by Amnesty International as being "absolutely illegal" and "shameful and malicious," was widely criticized by human rights organizations for exposing migrants to attacks while waiting interminably in Mexico for a court hearing in the US. Tens of

thousands of migrants were forced to live in squalid internment camps near the US border. According to Human Rights First, many migrants reported being subject to kidnappings, rapes and other violent attacks.

In June 2019, the AMLO administration entered another agreement to further the collaboration with the Trump administration, deploying 6,000 members of the newly created National Guard to the southern border of Mexico. The deployed units effectively served as shock troops to terrorize workers and poor peasants coming north from Central America.

With his trademark sanctimony of “always respecting the human rights of migrants,” AMLO’s administration has overseen innumerable human rights abuses by the military against defenseless migrants in search of a better life.

In Piedras Negras, Coahuila, on February 2019, AMLO’s government responded with force when around 2,000 immigrants, including hundreds of children, protested the poor conditions of their detention center.

Reports of killings of migrants by state forces are also frequent, such as the case of Maria Senaída Escobar, a 19-year-old immigrant from El Salvador, who was shot dead by Mexican police while riding as a passenger in a car trying to get to Santa Cruz, California to reunite with her father. The case was never investigated and her father continues asking for justice.

To date, the AMLO administration has spent \$175 million to deport migrants, 15 times as much as what has been allocated to the Mexican Commission for Refugee Aid (COMAR). The majority of these funds have been funneled into the coffers of private bus companies employed by the administration to repatriate migrants, a clear violation of international law. ETN, a private luxury bus company, was awarded a contract for \$112 million for its role in busing back immigrants. Similarly, airlines Viva Aerobus and Magnicharters have also reaped benefits from this arrangement.

As the formal facilities used to hold immigrants quickly overflowed, Mexican authorities began to use open-air fields, sports stadiums and other makeshift encampments to hold thousands of people. Immigration centers have been reported to be filled up to five times their capacity. These deplorable conditions prompted the consul of Guatemala in Chiapas to describe the detention facilities as “an absolute indignity” and “the worst I’ve ever seen.”

The number of immigrant detentions continue to reach alarming new highs. In 2023, up to November, 486,424 immigrants were detained, up from 314,639 in 2022, a 55

percent increase. Deportations have seen a similar trend, going from 126,770 to 200,308, a 58 percent increase.

During this time, AMLO has played a criminal role, exposing the bankruptcy of “left” populism and nationalism.

At every step, AMLO has made clear that subservience to US imperialism is paramount to his policy, such as his statement that “[t]he immigration issue is a top priority” after the 2019 sacking of then commissioner of the National Migration Institute, Tonatiuh Guillén. By transforming the Mexican government into a southern appendage of the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), AMLO’s administration has become an accomplice in the US imperialist assault on immigrants.

At the root of the mass migration of the impoverished working population in Latin America and beyond lies the global capitalist system and its nation-state framework. Contrary to the claims of AMLO and other pseudo-leftist politicians that the solution lies in job-promotion funding for source countries to make migration unattractive, such incentives and investments merely serve as a boon for the respective national bourgeoisies and a deepening exploitation of the working class in those countries as they continue to fulfill their assigned role as a source of cheap labor.

A real solution to the immigration problem requires the expropriation of the wealth of the parasitical ruling class, as well as wresting control of the world productive forces from the hands of the ruling class to place them under democratic control of the international working class. The suffering of billions of impoverished workers can only be eliminated through the rational planning of world production to satisfy human needs, rather than the current blind and anarchistic pursuit of profit.

This requires the independent political mobilization of the international working class on the basis of a revolutionary socialist program.



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