

Migrant children held in fetid open-air encampments near Southern California-Mexico border

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The Biden administration's brutal crackdown on undocumented immigrants has resulted in tens of thousands of asylum seekers languishing in outdoor holding areas in the Southern California-Mexico border region while waiting to be apprehended and taken to detention centers.

The holding areas, which are essentially outdoor encampments, have no sewerage systems, running water and basic supplies of any kind. Immigration detention centers are themselves strained to capacity as asylum claims, when not denied outright, often take an interminably long time to process, if at all.

According to a recent article in the *New York Times*, recent heavy rains have led to asylum seekers to seek shelter in dumpsters and overflowing porta-potties. Volunteers visiting the migrants have recorded deep lacerations, broken bones, fevers, diarrhea, vomiting and seizures. One medical volunteer called the situation "apocalyptic."

The broken bones and lacerations are often the result of attempts to scale border walls and pass through concertina wire. On March 2, a mass casualty event was recorded at the border wall at the US-Mexico border in San Diego, California, as 10 people fell from the top of the 30-foot-high wall. Moreover, long treks through deserts on both sides of the border often lead to severe dehydration and associated maladies.

"From a public health standpoint, there are communicable diseases and outdoor exposures that would strike anyone down, much less this medically vulnerable population," Dr. Theresa Cheng, a San Francisco-based emergency room physician providing services at the border area, told the *Times*.

Young migrants and even infants are particular

susceptible to disease and malnutrition, with volunteers reporting migrants eating leaves after trying to survive for five days or longer without food. Mothers had also reportedly stopped producing breast milk for their infants due to trauma, with no formula provided by border patrol officers as a substitute.

Last Friday, a Federal District Court judge in California questioned the Biden administration's claim that it holds no responsibility for the housing and feeding of migrant children at two of the encampments at the border fence in San Diego and at another remote mountainous region east of the city.

The legal challenge brought before the court by immigrant rights groups argues that as the children are in government custody, they must be given access to toilets, food, drinking water and emergency medical care through the provisions of a 1997 ruling known as the *Flores* agreement. The agreement also specifies that migrant children must be turned over within 72 hours to the US Health and Human Services Department, which in turn releases the minors to family in the United States while a judge considers asylum.

The argument raised by lawyers for the administration and US Customs and Border Patrol is that the migrants are not officially in US custody while outside of an official detention center and thus were not entitled to receive food and medical care. "Minors in these areas—close to the California-Mexico border—have not been arrested or apprehended by C.B.P. and are not in the custody of C.B.P."

When US District Judge Dolly Gee challenged the Justice Department's (DOJ) custody claims by asking if the migrants were "free to leave" the area, DOJ attorney Fizza Batool responded, "As long as they do

not proceed further into the United States.”

Gee did not issue a ruling after the half hour hearing on Friday.

In its arguments the Biden DOJ is effectively claiming that migrants have no legal right to asylum whatsoever, an act which clearly contravenes international law. By their logic, migrants have no other rights but the “right” to go back to their countries of origin where they face ongoing violence, repression and unbearable poverty. As such, there is nothing accidental about the lack of food, water, shelter and medical care at the encampments.

Such conditions, as horrible as they are, are only a foretaste of what the US ruling elite of both parties are actively planning.

Donald Trump’s 2024 presidential election campaign relies heavily on the scapegoating and victimization of immigrants. Reviving the traditions of early 20th century fascism, Trump, at a March rally for Ohio Senate candidate Bernie Moreno, said that migrants were “animals.”

“I don’t know if you can call them ‘people’, in some cases,” Trump said. “They’re not people, in my opinion.”

The former president has also claimed that immigrants were “poisoning the blood” of America and has promised to conduct mass deportations of immigrants upon assuming the presidency. Trump adviser and speech writer Stephen Miller recently promised that the administration would begin deporting at least 10 million undocumented immigrants currently residing in the US by deputizing National Guard soldiers from states with Republican governors.

Miller also pledged that an incoming Trump administration would deport immigrants in the country illegally if suspected of engaging in unacceptable political speech, such as supporting the cause of the Palestinian people.

For its part, the Biden administration is marching in lockstep with the Trump administration’s former, and promised future, persecution of immigrants. Last month, Biden made a direct appeal to Trump, despite the fact that the latter no longer holds political office, to “join me” in passing a bill the current president described as the “toughest, most efficient, most effective border security bill this country has even seen.”

The bill would essentially eliminate the right of migrants to claim asylum in the US altogether and greatly expand the construction of immigrant detention facilities which, with the denial of asylum, would effectively serve as immigrant concentration camps. It would also grant the president unprecedented authority to shut down ports of entry.

The bill also provides no pathway to citizenship for children or the chance to obtain green cards.

In fact, the Biden administration, even without the bill, is conducting massive crackdowns on immigrants along with mass deportations. Following in the footsteps of Trump and his predecessor Obama, the latter of whom earned the nickname “deporter in chief,” the Biden administration deported 142,000 immigrants in fiscal year 2023, double the number the year before.

The Supreme Court is also set to hear an appeal from the Biden administration arguing that it has the power to separate families of mixed immigration status.



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