

Rights Action  
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(Time Magazine)

## **Returning Guatemalan Refugees to the Very Conditions the United States and Canada Help Create**

The U.S. and Canadian governments, the U.S. military and Canadian mining companies are helping create the conditions of poverty, violence, corruption and impunity that desperate people flee, that we are deporting refugees back to.

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### **The U.S. Has Deported More Than 30,000 Guatemalans This Year Alone**

By [Jika González](#), July 31, 2014, <http://time.com/3063232/guatemala-us-deportations/>

The airport in Guatemala City is a revolving door for deported migrants. As soon as they get off the airplane and through the doors that lead them back into their country, almost half the returnees turn right back towards the north. “Sometimes they have been sent back five, eight or even nine times,” said Rafael Amado, Communications Director at the Guatemalan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “The government has several initiatives to encourage them to stay, but it’s not enough.”

After a long trip with their ankles and hands tied down, and an unspecified amount time spent in detention before that, the returnees must face the very thing they left: A country where [54 percent of the population lives in poverty](#), where the rate of young children with chronic malnutrition is the [fourth highest in the world](#), and where drug cartels and gangs rule the streets.

When deportees arrive, migration services give them water, a sandwich and a phone call. If they’re lucky, they also get a ride or a bus pass courtesy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but not much else. Though some know where to go and how to get there, most come with little or no money in their pocket, and some come to find a country they have left for years and is no longer home.

“It’s hard to come back,” said Oscar González, a volunteer with the [Association of Integral Support for Migrants](#). “I was gone for ten years, I had a life in the United States, I was paying off a house.”

Three years after his deportation, González works to help those just like him. His organization assists deportees by handing out water and cookies, letting them make phone calls and helping with job placement for those who return with English language skills. But organizations like this one are scarce, poorly funded and understaffed.

“I’m leaving again in 15 or 20 days,” said Ronny Mendez, 35, as he waited for his turn to use the phone. “I have already invested money so I need to go back.” Mendez claims he paid 45,000 Quetzales, or about \$5750, for a smuggler — called coyotes — to take him back to the U.S. “There are coyotes — human smugglers — waiting outside of the airport where the deportees arrive,” said Mario Hernandez, Director of the Association of Integral Support for Migrants. Many smugglers charge a one-time fee that covers two or three tries to get all the way across the Mexican-American border.

The U.S. flew 50,221 deportees back to Guatemala last year alone. By June of this year, more than 30,000 had been deported. According to Fernando Lucero, the spokesperson for the Migration Authority of Guatemala, if the number of deportations continues at the same pace, more than 60,000 will have been deported by the end of the year.

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## What To Do?

- **Short term / Immediate:** U.S. citizens must work with local refugee/ migrant groups to pressure Senators and Members of Congress to ensure humane treatment of all migrants with full due process of the law, whether they are in the U.S. in their home countries, or 'en route' to the U.S..
- **Medium / Long term:** U.S. and Canadian citizens must get involved in efforts to hold the U.S. and Canadian governments, companies and investors, and institutions like the World Bank and IMF, fully accountable when they help create, keep in place and profit from the very economic and violent, repressive conditions – in countries like Guatemala and Honduras – that so many people are forced to flee.

“**Harvest of Empire**” - Recommend viewing/ reading.

## Rights Action

Rights Action funds grassroots organizations in Guatemala and Honduras (and in southern Mexico and El Salvador) working for community controlled development, environmental protection, truth, justice and human rights, and for democracy and the rule of law. Rights Action does education and activism work concerning how the United States and Canada sometimes contribute to and benefit from endemic harms and violations in these countries. Rights Action (Canada), founded in 1999, is independent from Rights Action (USA).

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To support community-based work for human rights, justice, the environment and community controlled development in Honduras and Guatemala, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

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