

## First refugees of 'Central American exodus' arrive at US border

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/first-refugees-of-central-american-exodus-arrive-at-us-border>

- **Below:** article by Sandra Cuffe, Al Jazeera news

As caravans of refugees head north, as 100s more Hondurans & Guatemalans flee their countries every day, gov'ts of the US and Canada, the World Bank, global companies and investors maintain full economic, military and political relations with the undemocratic, corrupt, repressive, military-backed government in Honduras and Guatemala that force 10s of 1000s of their own people to flee, every year.

- **Read:** 30 days of refugee caravan reporting by Sandra Cuffe, Al Jazeera news:  
<https://www.aljazeera.com/profile/sandra-cuffe.html?fbclid=IwAR0v8J89VvkxRSHqITwwKVTX-gePFbZrWxTyrVscakQLOOV2hrLp94kb8Fo4>

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## First refugees of 'Central American exodus' arrive at US border

by Sandra Cuffe, AlJazeera news, 14 Nov 2018

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/11/central-american-exodus-arrives-mexico-border-181114191104226.html>



A US Marine sets up a barricade with concertina wire at the border between Mexico and the US [Jorge Duenes/Reuters]

After a month-long journey, Central American migrants and refugees fleeing violence and poverty in large groups are beginning to arrive at the southern border of the United States to seek asylum. Hundreds of asylum seekers have reached the border this week and thousands more are on their way to Tijuana, in the northwestern corner of Mexico. They face long wait times at the San Ysidro port of entry, asylum restrictions, potential indefinite detention and a heavily fortified border.

Thousands of active-duty US troops have been deployed along the southern border with Mexico, including to several ports of entry that likely won't see asylum seekers from the largely Honduran exodus, previously dubbed the migrant caravan.

US officials shut down three lanes at the San Ysidro crossing on Tuesday, and it and other border gates and fences have been fortified with concertina wire. Hundreds of asylum seekers who arrived at San Ysidro prior to the collective exodus faced an estimated one-month wait time.

In response to the Central American exodus, which Donald Trump falsely deemed "an invasion", the US president and his administration implemented restrictions on asylum claims, limiting processing to asylum-seekers arriving at official ports of entry.

Tent camps are also being set up in US border areas for the indefinite detention of asylum-seekers while their claims are being processed, US officials announced earlier this month. The measures to restrict asylum claims and potentially indefinitely detain asylum seekers, including children, are unlawful, rights groups have pointed out.

Both US and international law establish that anyone has the right to seek asylum regardless of how they enter the US, and US courts have set restrictions on the immigration detention of children, including a 20-day limit, adequate temperature controls and properly licensed management. The announced plans for indefinite detention in tent camps are undergoing a court challenge.

### **Fears of transphobic violence**

The first Central Americans to arrive in Tijuana ahead of the main wave were part of an LGBTI group comprised of several dozen people, a majority of whom are transgender women. The group had been travelling together for safety in the face of frequent harassment from men in the main group.

RAICES, a Texas-based migrant support group, raised funds to provide buses from Mexico City to Tijuana for the LGBTI group. The long wait times for asylum claim processing at the border place the group at further risk of violence, according to migrant rights groups. "The last time a trans group came through, [people] tried to burn their shelter down with them inside. They are not safe in Tijuana and have few options for shelter," Al Otro Lado, a cross-border legal services organisation for refugees and separated families, tweeted on Monday.

Transgender women also often experience violence, discrimination, and medical neglect in detention. Roxana Hernandez, a Honduran transgender woman who travelled to the US with a migrant and refugee caravan earlier this year, died in Immigration and Customs Enforcement custody from health complications suspected to have been aggravated by her detention in freezing cold conditions in New Mexico detention facilities.

Central American LGBTI asylum-seekers risk the dangers of travel and detention because the situation at home in many countries is drastically more dangerous, especially for gay men and transgender women. "Trans people in my neighbourhood are killed and chopped into pieces, then dumped inside [100-pound sacks]," Hernandez said in an interview with BuzzFeed News before crossing into the US and dying in ICE custody.

Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala have had some of the world's highest per capita homicide rates for years, but LGBTI residents are disproportionately targeted. Local LGBTI groups estimate that more than 250 LGBTI people have been murdered in Honduras alone over the past decade.

Homophobic and transphobic government discourse helps increase and encourage violent attacks, according to Adriana Munoz, a spokeswoman for the Reinas de la Noche (Queens of the Night) trans association in Guatemala. "There's a cascade of violence against LGBTI people," she told Al Jazeera.

Reinas de la Noche and many groups affiliated with REDLACTRANS, a Latin American and Caribbean network of transgender people and organisations, have been involved in gender identity bill proposals in their respective countries, to ensure transgender people can exercise basic rights to gender identity, including the right to accurate updated gender identification on government documents.

In Guatemala, the bill, which faced strong opposition from the government, right-wing parties in Congress and religious groups, did not pass, further entrenching the discrimination trans individuals face in the country.

The continued discrimination and violence Central American LGBTI refugees face when they flee home for the US to seek asylum was highlighted by Amnesty International in a November 2017 report dedicated to the issue. "Terrorised at home, and abused while trying to seek sanctuary abroad, they are now some of the most vulnerable refugees in the Americas. The fact that Mexico and the USA are willing to watch on as they suffer extreme violence is, simply, criminal," Amnesty International Americas Director Erika Guevara-Rosas said in a statement when the report, No Safe Place, was published.

### **'The exodus will continue'**

LGBTI migrants and refugees are particularly targeted with violence, but safety in numbers is a driving factor behind the new form of collective migration in general. Over the past two decades, thousands of migrants and refugees have been killed or disappeared along the route north.

Rates of homicide and forced disappearance are particularly high in northeastern Mexico, which prompted the current group's decision to travel more than 1,000km further to the Pacific coastal crossing in Tijuana.

Many Central Americans have also died from exposure to the elements while crossing into the US through desert areas between official ports of entry. The current exodus has always planned to arrive at an official port of entry to seek asylum.

The exodus is highly visible due to international media attention and is a significant shift in the way people migrate north, but the mass migration itself from northern Central America is not extraordinary. Hundreds of people flee Honduras alone every day, according to rights groups.

Media attention has largely focused on the first wave of the exodus now gradually beginning to arrive in Tijuana, but the group of more than 6,000 asylum-seekers is just the first wave of a larger trend. Thousands more migrants and refugees, mainly from Honduras and El Salvador, are heading north through Mexico in subsequent groups. A second wave of people has reached Mexico City, a large Salvadoran group is close behind, and others are making their way up through southern Mexico.

There are also preparations for further collective departures. A new group plans to depart San Salvador on Sunday, and planning is under way in Honduras and El Salvador for others through January of next year.

The phenomenon is not going to stop anytime soon, according to Ruben Figueroa, the Mesoamerican Migrant Movement coordinator for Central America and southeastern Mexico. "The exodus is going to continue," he told Al Jazeera.

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## "The exodus is going to continue"

### Media ignoring roles of U.S. and Canadian governments

- "While refugees flee Honduras, the CBC does not report on how Canada contributes to underlying causes", <https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/while-refugees-flee-honduras-the-cbc-does-not-report-on-how-canada-contributes-to-underlying-causes>
- "Fact checking the Globe & Mail's refugee caravan "fact check"", <https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/fact-checking-the-globe-mails-refugee-caravan-fact-check>

Keep on sending copies of this information, and your own letters, to families, friends and networks, to your politicians and media, to your pension and investment funds, asking: Why our governments, companies and investment firms benefit from and turn a blind eye to the poverty, repression and violence, and environmental and health harms in places like Guatemala and Honduras?

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- Speakers: Invite us to give presentations about these inter-connected issues and struggles
- Delegations: Join educational delegations to Guatemala and Honduras to learn about these issues and struggles
- Recommended daily news: [www.democracynow.org](http://www.democracynow.org); [www.theintercept.com](http://www.theintercept.com);

### Other groups

- Honduras Solidarity Network: [www.hondurassolidarity.org](http://www.hondurassolidarity.org)
- Witness for Peace: [www.witnessforpeace.org](http://www.witnessforpeace.org)
- School of Americas Watch: [www.soaw.org](http://www.soaw.org)
- Common Frontiers Canada: [www.commonfrontiers.ca](http://www.commonfrontiers.ca)
- Breaking the Silence: [www.breakingthesilenceblog.com](http://www.breakingthesilenceblog.com)
- NISGUA (Network in Solidarity with People of Guatemala): [www.nisgua.org](http://www.nisgua.org)
- MiningWatch Canada: [www.miningwatch.ca](http://www.miningwatch.ca)
- GHRC (Guatemalan Human Rights Commission): [www.ghrc-usa.org](http://www.ghrc-usa.org)

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