

The root cause of migration to the United States, Mr. President, is us

By Sarah Sherman-Stokes, TheHill.com, Feb.12, 2021

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/root-cause-of-migration-to-the-united-states>



“If the US invades our countries, and imposes on us corrupt, murderous dictators, we will migrate to your country and stop complaining.”

CInPH (Indigenous Coordinator of Popular Power in Honduras)

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<https://thehill.com/opinion/immigration/538301-the-root-cause-of-migration-to-the-united-states-mr-president-is-us>

Last week, [President Biden](#) issued an [executive order](#) to address the root causes of migration from Central America to the United States. As part of these efforts, Biden has pledged \$4 billion over four years to decrease “[endemic corruption, violence and poverty](#)” in the region.

But the root cause of migration to the United States, Mr. President, is us. And until the United States reckons honestly with that reality, change will be elusive.

As a law professor and immigration lawyer, I’ve represented dozens of young people and families who fled violence and poverty in Central America. One of those young people was born

in rural El Salvador. His father had been part of the Salvadoran military during the civil war, during which the United States government spent billions of dollars supporting the military dictatorship, including [training Salvadoran military leaders in torture and counterintelligence](#).

His father was one such leader. When he wasn't on the front lines of the civil war, the father used violence at home, beating the boy's mother and older brothers. The mother, terrified, left the family.

When the civil war ended in 1992, my client was just 2 years old. Jobs were scarce in rural El Salvador, and with his mother gone, his father traveled north to find work in Boston. Just a young boy, my client was raised by his paternal grandparents, landless agricultural workers. During this time, [imbalanced trade agreements between the United States and Central America](#) dramatically increased the flow of American farm products to the region, devastating small family farmers such as the grandparents, who struggled to feed him and his brothers.

By age 16, not only was my client hungry, but it no longer was safe for him to attend school. The MS-13 gang, [born in Southern California](#) as Central American migrants tried to defend themselves against U.S. gangs, served as the de facto government in his small town. Indeed, in El Salvador, mass deportations from the United States between 1996 and 2002 [led to the return](#) of thousands of Salvadoran gang members who had fled their homeland during the war. My client said he could not leave his house without being harassed or threatened, as gang members tried to recruit him. He didn't want to join the gang, but he had seen what happened to friends who refused. Starving and scared, he fled to the United States.

Migration from Central America today is primarily the result of U.S. policies that have exacerbated violence, poverty, food insecurity and climate change. Our immigration laws, one-sided trade deals, and decades of military intervention have left hundreds of thousands of Central Americans with no choice — they must flee their homes to save their lives and the lives of their families.

The Biden administration can change that by honestly addressing the harms we have inflicted on the region, as well as our role in driving mass migration. Taking responsibility for the damage we've done must be the first step toward collective change. Thereafter, we should use this money, and these promises, not for increased military and security aid, as has been tradition in the past, but for repair and reparation. A massive legalization program that provides a fast pathway to citizenship for the [more than 15 percent](#) of unauthorized immigrants in the United States who hail from Central America would be a start. Renegotiating trade agreements that impoverish rural Central Americans and destroy indigenous land and culture should be a next step, followed by directed aid that helps Central American farmers diversify their crops, reforest their land and sustain themselves and their families despite devastating climate change. Finally, we need substantial, well-funded education, rehabilitation, and reentry programs for those that want to leave street gangs behind.

Of the more than \$4 billion of aid that the United States gave to El Salvador during the civil war in the 1980s, [more than 70 percent went to weapons and the military](#). Forty years later, the results have been devastating. Today, under President Biden, another \$4 billion is on the line, along with an opportunity for this country to lead in a dramatically different direction. I hope we take it.

[Sarah Sherman-Stokes](#) is a clinical associate professor and associate director of the Immigrants' Rights and Human Trafficking Program at Boston University School of Law, where she also teaches immigration law and a seminar on asylum and immigration enforcement at the border. Follow her on Twitter [@sshermanstokes](#)

“Shithole countries”: US, Canada and international community help produce forced migrancy from Honduras & Guatemala

By Grahame Russell, Rights Action, February 9, 2021

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/us-government-promises-pathway-to-citizenship-for-11-million-people>

"Our privileges are located on the same map as their suffering,
and may -in ways we prefer not to imagine- be linked to their suffering.

As the wealth of some implies the destitution of others."

(Susan Sontag)

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