

Doomed New York Times reporting about Central American forced migrancy No reporting on direct responsibilities of the US & international community

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/doomed-new-york-times-reporting>

This NYT report – below - accurately describes some of the very oppressive conditions in which Rights Action continues our work in support of community defense and justice struggles, and COVID / hurricane relief projects in both Guatemala and Honduras.

As per usual, this article does not report how US political, economic and military policies and actions – going back generations, and particularly since the US and Canadian-backed military coup in 2009 – prop up and keep in power the repressive, drug-trafficking Honduran regime and the violent economic order that forces so many to desperately flee, year after year.

Until there is honesty and full accountability in the US, Canada and the international community, this US and “international community”-fueled cycle of macabre violence, poverty and hunger is bound to continue.

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‘We Are Doomed’: Devastation From Storms Fuels Migration in Honduras

By [Natalie Kitroeff](#), Photographs by Daniele Volpe, April 6, 2021

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/06/world/americas/migration-honduras-central-america.html>

SAN PEDRO SULA, Honduras — Children pry at the dirt with sticks, trying to dig out parts of homes that have sunk below ground. Their parents, unable to feed them, scavenge the rubble for remnants of roofs to sell for scrap metal. They live on top of the mud that swallowed fridges, stoves, beds — their entire lives buried beneath them.

“We are doomed here,” said Magdalena Flores, a mother of seven, standing on a mattress that peeked out from the dirt where her house used to be. “The desperation, the sadness, that’s what makes you migrate.”

People have long left Honduras for the United States, fleeing gang violence, economic misery and the indifference of a government run by a president [accused of ties to drug traffickers](#).

Then last fall, two hurricanes hit impoverished areas of Honduras in rapid succession, striking more than four million people across the nation — nearly half the population — and leveling entire neighborhoods.



A couch buried in the soil in the Chamelecón neighborhood of San Pedro Sula, Honduras.

“People aren’t migrating; they’re fleeing,” said César Ramos, of the Mennonite Social Action Commission, a group providing aid to people affected by the storms. “These people have lost everything, even their hope.”

President Biden has insisted that the recent increase in migration to the United States is nothing out of the ordinary, just another peak in a long history of them, especially in months when the desert along the U.S.-Mexico border is cooler and more passable.

“It happens every single, solitary year,” Mr. Biden said in a news conference last month. “There is a significant increase in the number of people coming to the border in the winter months.” But last month, apprehensions at the southwest border of the United States [hit a 15-year high](#), part of a sharp uptick since Mr. Biden took office.

The majority of families and unaccompanied children are coming from Honduras and Guatemala, the two countries hit hardest by the hurricanes — a sign that the president’s more [welcoming policies on immigration](#) have drawn people at a time when they are especially desperate to leave.

“It’s a detonating event that is in its own right massive,” Andrew Selee, president of the Migration Policy Institute, said of the storms. “An event like the Covid recession, plus two hurricanes, and the potential for an even bigger spike is so much stronger.”

Eager to shift from his predecessor's hostile stance toward migrants, Mr. Biden has proposed spending \$4 billion to address the "root causes" of migration, and he [recently tapped Vice President Kamala Harris](#) to work with Central American leaders to better conditions in those countries.

Still, Mr. Biden has sent a clear message to anyone considering crossing the border in the meantime: "Don't come over," Mr. Biden [said in a recent interview](#).

The warning barely registers in parts of Honduras like Chamelecón, a sector of San Pedro Sula that is overrun by gangs and was pounded by both storms. Survivors of the disaster say they have no choice at all.

Months after the hurricanes, houses remain underwater. Gaping holes have [replaced bridges](#). Thousands of people are [still displaced](#), living in shelters or on the street. Hunger is stalking them.

"I never wanted to do this," said Ana Hernández, clutching her 11-year-old son's hand at a gas station in San Pedro Sula, the economic capital of Honduras. "The situation is forcing me to. You get to a point where you don't have anything to give them to eat."

Every night, busloads of people leave from the spot where she stood, many heading to Guatemala on the first leg of their journey to the United States. Ms. Hernández bought her tickets after months living in the carcass of her home, wrecked by the storms.

Mexico has begged the Biden administration to send more disaster relief aid to Central America. Mr. Biden has contended that under President Donald J. Trump, "instead of going down and helping in a major way" after the disasters, "we did nothing."

An official at the National Security Council said that the administration planned to dedicate \$112 million in humanitarian assistance to communities ravaged by the storms, on top of the \$61 million that had already been approved under Mr. Trump.

By contrast, President Bill Clinton [pushed through nearly a billion dollars](#) for the region in the late 1990s in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch, which killed more people but wrought a comparable level of damage as the recent storms, aid workers say.

Immediate humanitarian aid could certainly help alleviate hunger, homelessness and other crises spurred by the storms, as it seems to have done after Hurricane Mitch.

But it is much harder to prove that funding sent in the past to improve conditions in Central America has reduced migration, experts say, in part because corrupt politicians and elites have siphoned off the money or [undermined efforts to change their economies enough](#) to give the poor a reason to stay at home.

Now, in Honduras, the Biden administration's task has been made even more daunting because of the criminal cases against men linked to President Juan Orlando Hernández.

Prosecutors in New York have said that Mr. Hernández helped facilitate cocaine shipments from Honduras and, according to court documents, claimed to have [embezzled American aid money](#) through sham nonprofits. Mr. Hernández, the nation's leader since 2014, has denied the accusations and has not been charged. A spokesman did not provide comment.

"We need to be aggressively addressing the levels of despair that the folks hit by these storms are facing," said Dan Restrepo, who was a top adviser to President Barack Obama. "We need to go big now and we need to be loud about it, because that starts actually factoring into the calculus that people face today, which is, 'Can I survive here or not?'"

People smugglers are already taking advantage of Mr. Biden's presence in the White House to win new customers. Moving swiftly and loudly, Mr. Biden undid many of the harsh immigration policies pioneered by his predecessor.

Human traffickers in Honduras are enticing clients by promising a much easier journey north, touting Mr. Biden's refusal to immediately expel children at the border and making grand promises about how friendly the new administration will be, according to interviews with smugglers.

One trafficker outlined his latest pitch to Honduran families thinking about leaving: "They opened everything back up, now you can get in again," he said, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of the illegal nature of his work. "If they catch you, they send you to Mexico. It's not like before, where they sent you back to your country."

He added that since Mr. Biden's inauguration, he had sneaked 75 people across the American border illegally.

"Because of the new president, they are opening more doors," he said. "It's a free market. That's how we see it."

But rather than point to Mr. Biden, many Hondurans first blurt out their own president's name as a reason to leave home.

Mr. Hernández's brother was recently sentenced to life in prison by an American court for trafficking cocaine into the United States. Prosecutors said the president provided protection to his brother and other traffickers in exchange for cash.

For many Hondurans, the past few months in particular have provided a searing case study in how little they seem to matter to their government.

Jesus Membreño's house was sheared off the side of a mountain in the storms, but with nowhere else to go, he built a shelter over a piece of the cement floor that was left behind. "We received nothing from the government, not even a sheet of metal to replace our roof," Mr. Membreño said. He said he would head north alone in the coming weeks.

Residents in Canaan, a section of the Chamelecón suburb that was flattened in the hurricanes, say the government never even sent any tractors to clear the mud. So Ms. Flores and her neighbors are trying to feed their children by carving off pieces of their ruined homes and selling them as scrap metal.

"It's enough to buy some beans or rice," she said, traipsing through mud punctuated by the tips of children's bicycles and other rubble. "No one, not one politician or government, has helped us."

The first time Ms. Flores tried to get to the United States was after her ex-husband broke into her house and slashed her face and arms with a machete, in 2016, she said. She never made it.

The second time was this January, she said, after living with her children under an improvised tent after the storms damaged her home. The few possessions she had spent years accumulating — her stove, her fridge, her beds, her television — were swallowed by mud.

"It's the sadness, the disappointment that hits you," Ms. Flores said, "It's very hard to see your home buried. I had nothing left."

"We are doomed here," said Magdalena Flores. "The desperation, the sadness, that's what makes you migrate."

With six of her children, she joined the first migrant caravan of this year, in January, she said. They walked for miles, but turned back after barely eating for days and then getting tear-gassed and beaten by the Guatemalan police. That's when she stopped believing Mr. Biden was going to welcome anyone with open arms.

"If that were the case, why would they have sent me home?" she asked.

So Ms. Flores used parts of her old wooden house to build a shelter on top of the earth that devoured everything she had.

Now she's waiting for the next caravan to leave, driven not by hope but by despair.

Why do thousands of Hondurans & Guatemalans flee into exile year after year?

The US and Canadian governments, the World Bank and global businesses and investors (in the sectors of mining, dams, African palm, sugarcane, bananas, garment "sweatshop" factors, tourism, etc.) maintain enriching and

empowering relations with anti-democratic, corrupt, repressive governments in Honduras and Guatemala, contributing to and benefitting from exploitation and poverty, environmental harms, repression and human rights violations, corruption and impunity.

Act / Stir up the pot / Chip away

Keep sending copies of Rights Action information (and that of other solidarity groups/ NGOs) to family, friends, your networks, politicians and media, asking *'Why do our governments, companies and investment firms benefit from and turn a blind eye to poverty, repression and violence, environmental and health harms that caused the forced migrancy / refugee crisis in Guatemala and Honduras?'*

- U.S. Senate: <https://www.senate.gov/senators/contact>
- U.S. House: <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>
- Canadian Parliament: <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members>

Rights Action (US & Canada)

Since 1995, Rights Action: funds human rights, environment and territory defense struggles in Guatemala and Honduras; funds victims of repression and human rights violations, health harms and natural disasters; and works to hold accountable the U.S. and Canadian governments, multi-national companies, investors and banks (World Bank, etc.) that help cause and profit from exploitation and poverty, repression and human rights violations, environmental harms, corruption and impunity in Honduras and Guatemala.

Follow work of and get involved with other solidarity/NGO groups

- CISPES (Committee in Solidarity with People of El Salvador): www.cispes.org
- Honduras Solidarity Network: www.hondurassolidarity.org
- Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective: www.solidaritycollective.org
- Friendship Office of the Americas: <https://friendshipamericas.org>
- NISGUA (Network in Solidarity with People of Guatemala): www.nisgua.org
- GHRC (Guatemalan Human Rights Commission): www.ghrc-usa.org
- Breaking the Silence: www.breakingthesilenceblog.com
- Alliance for Global Justice: www.afgj.org
- CODEPINK: www.codepink.org
- School of Americas Watch: www.soaw.org
- Mining Watch Canada: www.miningwatch.ca
- Mining Injustice Solidarity Network: <https://mininginjustice.org>
- Mining Justice Alliance: <https://miningjusticealliance.wordpress.com>
- Common Frontiers Canada: www.commonfrontiers.ca

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To support land, human rights and environmental defender groups in Honduras and Guatemala, and COVID and hurricane relief work, make check to "Rights Action" and mail to:

- U.S.: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887
- Canada: (Box 552) 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

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