"REMAIN IN MEXICO" RULES PREVENT REFUGEES FROM WORKING IN THE UNITED STATES OR MEXICO

Central Americans face certain death at home, stark poverty in Tijuana

STORY BY JULIA WOOCK, NEWS EDITOR

No year after snaking processions of Central American refugees populated international newscasts to all corners of the globe, they are largely forgotten in a fetid corner of Tijuana. Streams of indios dressed in the cheerful colors of their Mesoamerican textiles forded rivers, trod empty roadways, and clamored aboard flimsy buses during their fleeting moment on the world stage thanks to NBC, BBC and Reuters.

Today they wait in hand-me-down Knott’s Berry Farm t-shirts in tumbledown sanctuaries in crime-infested pockets of Baja California — meters away from Alta California, U.S.A. Barely eight miles from Southwestern College an international drama has hit pause. The Trump Administration has overturned decades of American policy and practice related to refugees. Instead of allowing them to wait in the U.S. prior to administrative hearings on their refugee applications, migrants must remain in Mexico, where they are no more welcome than they are in America.

La familia López Velásquez
El Paraíso, Honduras

This year Santos Catalino López Velásquez was shot in the face by criminals and engaged in a shootout with pistoleros at his home while his family hid behind furniture. His arm and nose were broken by thugs, he nearly lost an eye and has glass embedded in his face. He lost his farm to gangsters and had his house burned to the ground. He traveled 3,500 torturous miles to la línea, where he is forced by the U.S. government to live in a hovel. López Velásquez and his family are refugees from Honduras stranded in Tijuana by the Trump Administration’s “Wait in Mexico” policy. The 42-year-old former coffee farmer suffered another cruel turn this week when U.S. immigration officials took one look at his baby daughter and cancelled his asylum appointment with a dismissive wave of the hand. “Chickenpox, no puede pasar,” he said.

American officials swiftly rejected a note from an American doctor that sought medical help for the seven-month-old. Safety and hope beckoned less than 100 yards away. On the other side of la frontera López Velásquez’ nephew was waiting. He had traveled all the way from Wisconsin to pick up the Honduran refugees and sponsor them in The Badger State. “No puede pasar, varicela,” he said. News that might devastate most people was just another setback for the remarkably optimistic López Velásquez. Even as he recounted fear, pain and bitter disappointments, Central Americans face certain death at home, stark poverty in Tijuana
Migrants: Refugees are fleeing the violence of their native lands.

The United Nations has categorized refugees as people who are 
being forcibly displaced across borders due to conflict, persecution, or other serious reasons. Refugees are entitled to certain rights and protections under international law.

A young mother abandoned her children in a refugee camp.

The woman, who asked not to be named to protect her identity, said she had to leave her children behind because the situation was too dangerous.

Refugees face numerous challenges in their journeys to safety, including long and arduous travel, language barriers, and uncertainty about their future. They may also experience trauma and psychological distress.

Refugees who are able to reach safety may face additional challenges, such as finding shelter, food, and healthcare. Many refugees rely on the hospitality of host communities and international organizations to support them.

Refugees are often2
deportede
to their countries of origin or to other countries, where they may face persecution or violence. These individuals are considered “stateless” and do not have a citizenship or nationality recognized by any country.

Refugees who do not receive protection may be at risk of exploitation, abuse, or violence. They may also face barriers to accessing education, employment, and other basic needs.

Refugees are entitled to certain rights and protections under international law. These rights include the right to receive humanitarian assistance, the right to seek and receive asylum, and the right to travel freely within their country of asylum.

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Refugee children are encouraged to share their stories of their journeys, as depicted in the image of a refugee child.
Refugees face brutality, death in their native lands

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stagnant and weary. Frustration finally due to their baby daughter’s chickenpox. Yesenia Ardon Ortiz (below) fled poverty in El Salvador to work and send money to her family. Mexican officials will not issue her a work permit.

She said she and her counterpart stayed in abandoned homes they would encounter to rest and recover from oppressive heat and humidity. Or bitter mountain cold.

“ ‘What really kills you is the cold,’ she recalled. ‘The sun that would burn your face and dermis at the sun is about 70 percent hot.’ ”

“ ‘That’s all the time you can stand in the sun, because your hands will turn red or blister and you’ll start to feel all over your body and you can’t carry on. Then you can’t sleep. So they rest and make sure they eat something to sleep.’ ”

The feeling of despair and separation from your family, the blisters and ulcers on your feet from walking all day. Being sunburnt. The heat in that you need to carry water to survive, but that same weight is pulling you down and makes your body ache. You’re carrying your luggage and your water. You feel you can’t carry on. That despair makes you take a different path.”

Yesenia Ardon Ortiz, El Salvadoran refugee

“ ‘You dare not fall asleep,’ she said. ‘You must remain awake. You have to tie yourself to something to sleep.’ ”

Ardon Ortiz said she understood why God told the Mexican immigration officials they were going to work in Tijuana. It worked and the woman boarded the bus just before it rolled out. They brushed paths with immigration a second time in Tecate, but got lucky. La Bestia had already detained a group and were occupied. She said after a month they arrived in Tijuana.

“ ‘I am alive thanks to God and was able to survive La Bestia,’ she said.

There were places in Mexico that denied service to refugees. Some restaurants and food stands posted angry hand-made signs that read NO MIGRANTES. Proprietors would spot them and slam their doors, even though they had money to pay for their food.

“ ‘They tell you no migrants or simply ignore you. They can tell you are a migrant because your hair is messy or you are sunburned. The sun is not the only thing that burns your skin. The wind and the chill burn it, too. They can see in your face that you are not from there. They can tell that maybe you have not bathed in a couple days.’ ”

Ardon Ortiz said she understood why some people may have disliked migrants. Previous caravans had come through and “practically left all of Mexico dirty.” They made signs that read NO MIGRANTES. Proprietors would spot them and slam their doors, even though they had money to pay for their food.

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