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Trump's anti-asylum "Remain in Mexico" policy to expand to Arizona

In a marked expansion of the Trump administration's war on immigrants, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced on Thursday that the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) or "Remain in Mexico" policy will expand to Arizona.



Migrants from El Salvador traveling in a caravan cross the Suchiate River, the border between Guatemala and Mexico, (AP Photo/Oscar Rivera)

Immigrants seeking asylum at the border city of Nogales, Arizona, the majority of whom are refugees fleeing poverty and violence in their home countries, will be turned back and left to fend for themselves on the southern side of the border.

The extension of MPP to Nogales, some 50 miles south of Tucson, makes it the seventh major port of entry on the Mexican border to deny entry to immigrants. The others, San

Diego, Calexico, El Paso, Laredo, Brownsville, and Eagle Pass have all seen refugee encampments crop up just across the border in the Mexico.

The Remain in Mexico policy has to date turned back more than 60,000 immigrants, forcing them to wait in Mexico while their legal cases for entry into the US—which can drag on for years and the overwhelming majority of which are rejected—are pending. This has resulted in **a network of refugee encampments** cropping up along the American-Mexican border near the major border crossing, leading to a humanitarian disaster.

Migrants left with no choice but to stay in these informal camps and live in fear of violent attacks against them are often dependent on charity or crime, and have little or no protection from the elements.

A recent report from Human Rights First (HRF) documented over 600 cases of “rape, kidnapping, torture, and other violent attacks against asylum seekers and migrants returned to Mexico under MPP.” Another study by the US Immigration Policy Center at University of California San Diego found that one in four people sent back under MPP were threatened with physical violence.

In the case of those immigrants turned back at Nogales, there is an extra impediment to their entry: Immigration hearings are currently held in El Paso, and immigrants previously waiting on the American side of the border would be bussed there. Now, those applying for asylum at Nogales will need to arrange their own transportation to El Paso, some 300 miles east.

The journey from Nogales to El Paso, moreover, will require the already vulnerable immigrants to travel on the border roads in the Mexican states of Sonora and Chihuahua—passing through an area dominated by the drug cartels, in which an American family was massacred in November.

The HRF report noted one case in which a mother and daughter applying for asylum were kidnapped and raped over a two-week period during which they were supposed to appear before an immigration judge to make their case. Because they couldn’t make the hearing, the judge ordered them deported.

If that is an indication of the general ruthlessness of the immigration courts, then for those immigrants left at Nogales, for whom even attending their hearings will be much more difficult, it will be all but impossible to enter the United States. A grand total of 11 migrants have been granted asylum on the southern border since the implementation of the MPP policy.

Far from being an unintended consequence of the policy, the abysmal conditions created by “Remain in Mexico” are aimed at deterring immigrants from seeking asylum as part of the Trump administration’s fascistic anti-immigrant program. The Trump administration hopes that by making conditions as hellish as those that led refugees to flee their homes in the first place, they can deter future arrivals.

In a DHS statement on Thursday, acting Secretary Chad Wolf said that “MPP has been an extremely effective tool as the United States, under the leadership of President Trump, continues to address the ongoing humanitarian and security crisis at the border. The Department is fully committed to the program and will continually work with the Government of Mexico to expand and strengthen it. I am confident in the program’s continued success in adjudicating meritorious cases quickly and preventing fraudulent claims.”

This would be impossible, were it not for the collaboration of the nominally “left” Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) who slavishly accepted the burden of hosting these refugees on the Trump administration’s request and has done nothing to alleviate their suffering. Equally responsible is the Democratic Party, which has dropped any nominal resistance to his attacks on immigrants and has consistently voted to fund Trump’s fascistic projects.

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