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“Young people should have the right to a good life”: Asylum seekers in open air camps along US/Mexico border speak out

With the expiration of Title 42, the Biden administration is continuing the bipartisan attack on immigrants and their right to asylum. Title 42, a Trump-era policy continued by Biden, used the COVID-19 pandemic as the pretext to turn away migrants fleeing violence and poverty throughout Central and Latin America, the legacy of more than a century of US imperialist subversion and exploitation.

The Biden administration was forced to lift Title 42 at 12:01 a.m. on Friday, following its termination of the official US public health emergency instituted in March of 2020 after the World Health Organization declared COVID a global pandemic.

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) chief Alejandro Mayorkas is leading the Biden administration’s new policy requiring asylum seekers to file for asylum in their home country or in “regional processing centers” to be set up in the very countries migrants are attempting to flee.

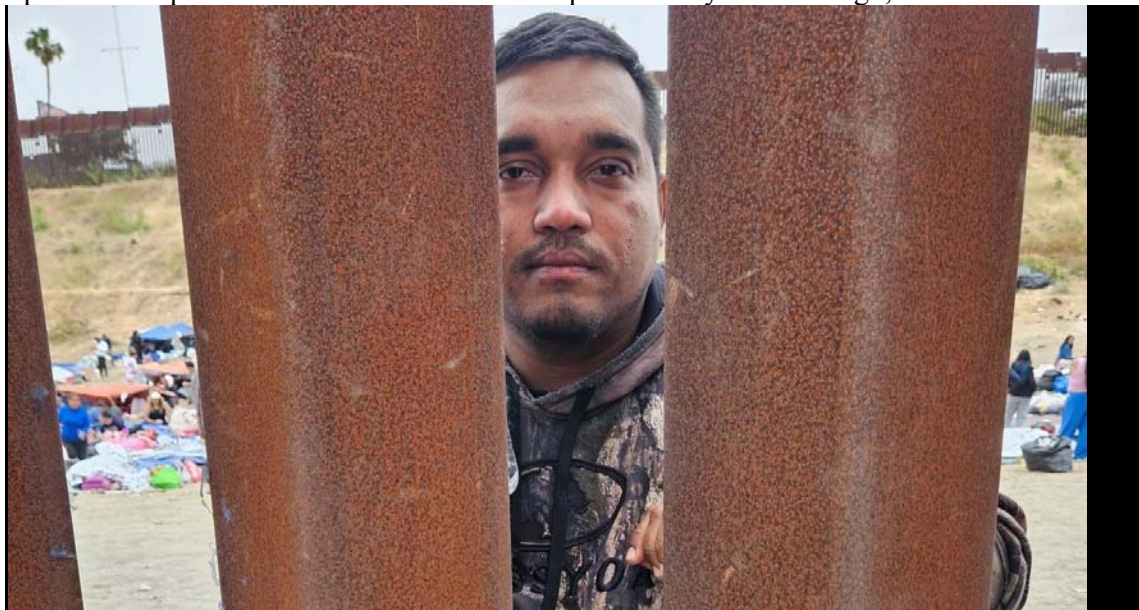


Volunteers organize distribution of basic necessities to migrants. [Photo: WSWS]

The US/Mexico border, already highly militarized, is being further transformed into an open-air prison camp, with 65,000 gathered along the boundary between the two countries. The migrants, most of whom have traversed deadly terrain and faced hunger and thirst, have been robbed, brutalized and even raped along the way to the US border. Now they are confronted with 24,000 armed Customs and Border Protection (CBP) guards and 1,500 active-duty US troops.

In addition, Texas Republican Governor Greg Abbott has unilaterally deployed 2,500 Texas National Guard troops to the state's border with Mexico. He and other fascistic figures, including ex-president Donald Trump, are doing their best to whip up an atmosphere of violence and xenophobia directed against the refugees.

World Socialist Web Site reporters were able to speak to migrants being held in groups of about 300 between the primary and secondary border walls in an open encampment without shelter. Volunteer organizations, churches and non-affiliated people and families have shown up at the camp located west of the San Ysidro port of entry in San Diego, California.



Miguel [Photo: WSWS]

Miguel, a 33 year-old father from Guatemala

Miguel said:

The journey here was very difficult because of all the terrain, having to pass through all the states in Mexico. Some parts by bus, other parts by train, and a lot of walking. Day and night and with nothing. You go hungry and thirsty.

The police in Mexico robbed me. It was difficult too because I could not work in Mexico since I'm an immigrant and did not have documents. I had whatever food the churches would give out, a cookie or a tortilla here and there. Mostly I ate from the streets.

I spent 60 days in Tijuana, then they had me in Tecate near the wall fence. Then they put me in the immigration jail there for three days and treated me like a dog. I had the flu and a terrible sore throat but had no medicine.

They don't tell us anything, we know nothing about what will happen. I think I have a 50 percent chance of being deported back to Guatemala, but I hope that they let me pass. I am not a delinquent or a drug trafficker, I just want to work. What I want the world to know is that my countrymen are all leaving because life is very difficult. We face robbery, assault, criminals and we have no opportunities. This is the only reason we come and make this sacrifice because we suffer so much.

Miguel fought back tears when he spoke about his two children, whom he had to leave behind.

It wasn't possible for my children to come. Aside from my father, who is working in California, all my family is in Guatemala. It's been so difficult making this journey alone. I have been suffering and I'm depressed. I have no support, I don't have anything. The only thing I hope is that they don't send me back.



A woman and girl distribute toys and coloring books to children. [Photo: WSWS]

Julio, 26, and his wife, from Colombia

The couple had arrived at the San Ysidro port of entry three days prior. Julio showed reporters the red wristband he wore with the word “Wednesday.”

At the camp, he said, “We are sleeping on the ground. We cannot shower, we have to use the bathroom on the hill. It’s so cold here at night, these are inhuman conditions.”

They made the arduous journey from Bogota, Colombia, through Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Mexico to escape the grueling poverty.

He said:

The economic situation is very intense and bad in Colombia. There is a lot of cultivation of cocaine, and all the gangs are fighting over territory. We don’t have any opportunities there and they make it horrible if you don’t follow along. There is no law since the government is also tied to these groups and there’s a lot of corruption.

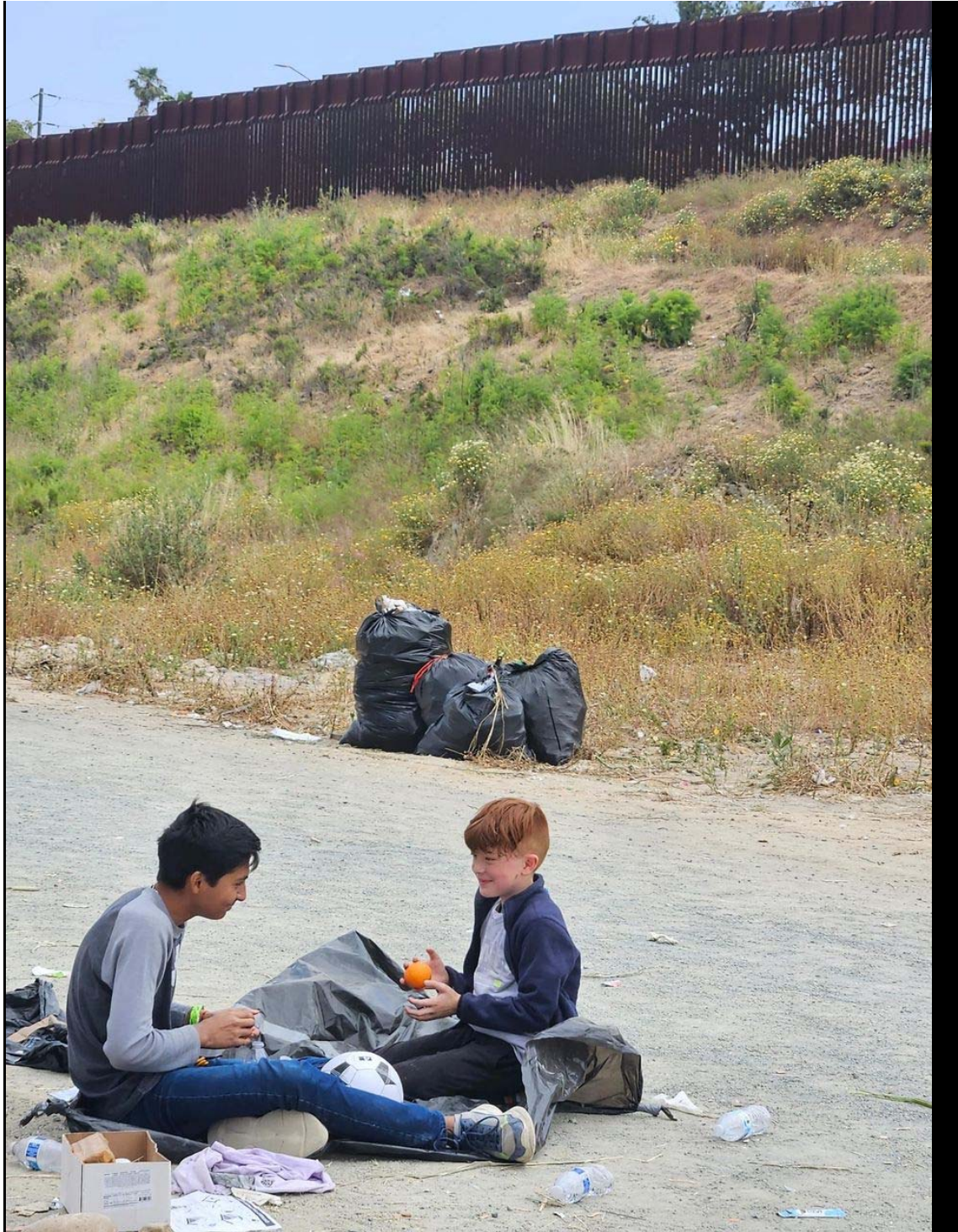
As young people, it’s really difficult, we have no future there. There are no jobs and we cannot study. For example, you have to work five or six years to save enough money just to buy a small car.

The journey here was very dangerous because of the coyotes. They rob you, people are kidnapped, they rape the girls. It’s terrible, so very terrible. People take a lot of ways to get here, they go by plane, by boat and walking. All along the way there are many dangers.

Speaking of the deportations by the US authorities, Julio stressed the need for asylum seekers to be granted entry:

It is not logical for them to deport us. We are all coming here for a reason. This is not what we chose, but we have no opportunities and face violence and poverty where we are from. We are human beings and all we want is a better life.

We’ve traveled so many kilometers and covered so much land. All we want to do is work and be productive. Young people should have the right to a good life.



Migrant children in prison camp along San Diego-San Ysidro border [Photo: WSWS]

Ana, a 26-year-old mother from Colombia

Ana told the WSWS:

I'm from Colombia. I'm here with my children, my son is 10 and my daughter is 6. The rest of my family is in Colombia. There I worked in sales, selling cell phones, clothes, everything. The journey here was very difficult. I have no money. I used it to pay for a flight to Cancun. From Cancun we took a bus. We walked a lot, we entered a sewage canal and ran through it, and finally we arrived here. It took us eight days.

That last hour or so to the wall was difficult. I remember when I was running I started to cry. The man to the side of me was yelling, “Let’s go! Let’s go!” I didn’t think I could do it. My children were running in front of me and others were passing by me. Running through the sewage was terrible. It was already full of poop, and here I could hardly walk. But they told us to run and to keep running.

The truth is that conditions there [in Colombia] are not easy. I came here because they wanted to kill my children. It’s dangerous, there are very bad people there.

All this happened back in November. My partner and I had a clothing business. These people started to ask us for money, but we didn’t have any. They beat my partner and almost killed him—that happened in January. We thought they were not going to do anything to us, but they found my children. I reported them, and when I reported them they took my son for one day and almost sent him back to me dead. They told me that I had 24 hours to leave Colombia or they would kill me and my children.

They threatened my mom too, but we didn’t have enough money, so my mom stayed in Colombia. She had to move to another city and is so distraught, crying all the time.

The police do not take care of us. I reported it and instead of taking care of me, they left me alone. A few days after I reported what happened they went and took my son out of school and took him away. They told me they were going to protect me, but they didn’t.

I don’t call the police any more. If, for example, armed men arrive at your house to kill you and you call the police, they will come three days later! The only way they will help you is if you have a lot of money and you pay them. Otherwise, nothing.

Ana explained that they did not know what would happen regarding asylum:

They aren’t really telling us anything. They have been taking the mothers and children away. They asked me if I had a husband and I said no, that the father of my children died six years ago. Another person told me that there have been people here since Wednesday. We arrived Thursday morning, so I think those people will go first.

The conditions here at the camp are not easy. I don’t have money so it makes everything more complicated. I cannot buy food, so we eat what we can get. Sometimes there’s not enough food for everyone. I haven’t eaten for three days.



An encampment of some 300 adults and children near the San Ysidro port of entry [Photo: WSWS]

There are many children here who are sleeping without a tent. I went out last night to find empty tents and I looked for those who had children, so that they could use the empty tents. I was helping several families get their children into tents, and there were a lot of children crying and asking, "Why are we here?" So many of the children are too young to really understand what is going on. Many of these kids had a bed at home in their country, food, and all that, so they go through this journey and get here and don't know why any of this is happening.

With my kids, my son knows what happened to him. He understands. But my daughter doesn't. So I told him not to tell her so as not to scare her. One night she asked me, crying, "Why are there so many policemen and what are they going to do to us? Can't we just leave?" And I have to tell her, no, we cannot do that.

When we were in the sewage canal, my daughter said, "This smells very bad and I don't want to run." I told her that her daddy went through here and you have to run if you want to get to daddy. We ran out the rest of the way because we have not seen him for a few months and she loves him very much, because he takes care of her.

So many children are afraid and scared here because they don't know why they are here.

On the health and well-being of her children, Ana noted:

My son is fine. My daughter has a delicate stomach. When we went through all that poop (the sewer) she vomited several times. I have already given her medicine for vomiting and I think she is doing better. But she now prefers not to eat, so it is weighing on me. They brought some soups, but I don't know, they didn't taste right.

We've been here in this tent for three days and there have been a lot of sweets. We have enough bottled water and too many chocolate bars. My daughter especially gets sick with too much sweets so she is just not eating.

I'm worried sick because I think they will send us back to Mexico, and from Mexico they'll send us back to Colombia, and I really can't go back because they are trying to kill my children there.

I don't let my cell phone download much, I keep it turned off. I just turn it on to tell my family how I am. I can't tell them everything I have seen, my mom is always crying.

I'm here because there are people in Colombia who want to kill my children. I preferred to come here to endure hunger to save them. I was not hungry in Colombia, as many people there are. I had food, a house and a bed. My family didn't have a ton of money, but we lived well and had food every day, thank God for that. Of course, I'd rather have all my family here with me. All of this gives my family a lot of regret. They text me if they had the money they would help me, and yet they don't have much money to send.

My hope is that they don't send me back. I want my children to be able to study, to have a good education. My son is very smart, so is my daughter. My daughter tells me, "I know how to speak English." She can only tell me the colors right now. I don't have much schooling either. I only finished elementary school and I want them to be able to study. My daughter tells me she wants to be a teacher.

That's all I want for them, to keep on living, to fulfill all of their dreams. I'm already dying, it doesn't matter. I've already lived, but they haven't.