

UNITED STATES - Unstoppable Surge of Migrant Children

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June 3rd 2014 – Central American leaders claim rights of children to be reunited with their parents, while US authorities assure that migrant children will be deported.

The surge of unaccompanied children and teenagers from Central America that are crossing the southern border of the United States have provoked an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Detention centers find themselves with serious problems of overcrowding and thousands of children arriving dehydrated and sick.

According to official US statistics, in the first five months of this year, forty seven thousand unaccompanied boys, girls, and adolescents were detained after illegally crossing the border with Mexico, a number that increased by 92% in one year. The majority hails from El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala and are less than twelve years old, during their dangerous journey to the US—mainly to be reunited with their parents—many of them are victims of crime and sexual abuse.

On June 15th, a child's decomposed body was found 32 km west of McAllen, TX. Five days later it was identified by Texan police as Gilberto Francisco Ramos Juarez, age eleven, from Huehuetenango in northern Guatemala. He traveled alone to meet up with his older brother that lives in Chicago. The terrible discovery places evidence with the dangers that unaccompanied migrant children face.

"You hear stories of girls that bring contraceptives because they know that some molestation could occur and some kids have died along the way or were kidnapped by the Zetas [the most dangerous drug cartel in Mexico]", said Flora Reynosa, chairwoman of the Advocates for the Displaced and Migrante Population of the Attorneys for Human Rights of Guatemala, in a statement to Noticias Aliadas.

In an attempt to find a solution to the crisis, the US vice president Joe Biden lengthened his trip to Latin America, that should have ended on June 19th, and made a last minute visit to Guatemala the next day where he discussed the topic with presidents Otto Perez Molina of Guatemala, Salvador Sanchez Ceren of El Salvador, Mexico's secretary of Governance Miguel Angel Osorio Chong, and the undersecretary of the Honduran government Jorge Ramon Hernandez.

The flow of migrant children constitutes not just a political problem but rather a humanitarian one for the US president Barack Obama. Anxious to gain political support, leaders of the dormant Republican party advocate that this crisis is a result of the lax immigration policies of the Obama administration and particularly of the Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), under which deportation can be deferred for some children and adolescents that illegally enter the US and that have lived there for a number of years.

During the talks, the Central American leaders insisted that the well-being of the children and their right to be with their families should prevail over whatever other worry, while Biden demanded them to dispel the myths that have arose concerning the migratory policy of the US government in terms of unaccompanied children.

"Don't fool yourselves, once the ruling has been carried out in a particular case, if he or she doesn't qualify for asylum, he or she will be deported from the US and will have to return to the country of origin. Everyone should know this. We prioritize the need to resolve these cases as fast as possible, keeping the

humanitarian crisis in mind. We keep in consideration the fact that many of the recent migrants fit in this category. I believe that it is a majority and they have to return to their homes”, Biden explained during a press conference inside the US embassy in Guatemala.

“We are all united in the urgent work to counteract and correct the lack of information that the traffickers are spreading about US immigration policies, and demotivate the families that send their children on this dangerous journey. The president of Guatemala announced that beginning in July an important campaign will be launched in openly in public media here in Guatemala so that the facts are made clear. The same initiative was made by the president of El Salvador and the Honduran representatives. Mexico’s is already underway. We hope that you all do this. Let us make sure to keep this commitment”, he added.

One week after Biden’s visit, Guatemala’s principal media conglomerate, which includes the national newspaper Prensa Libre, the TV channel Guatevisión and the regional newspaper El Quetzalteco, launched a campaign warning the population about the dangers of allowing their children to travel to the US illegally and unaccompanied, and demanded that the Guatemalan government improve security and work opportunities for young people, with the hope that better living conditions in their country will discourage them from emigrating.

Nonetheless, the National Council of Migrant Attention (CONAMIGUA), a government office that works in favor of migrant rights and dedicates assistance to foreigners as well as deportees, also demanded that the US government proportion necessary funds to process the cases of irregular migrant situations in a fast and efficient manner. According to CONAMIGUA, the US judicial system currently has just 260 immigration judges distributed in fifty-nine courts where 300,000 immigration cases await trial.

Foreign children received by DHS per fiscal year*

Country	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014**
El Salvador	1,221	1,910	1,394	3,314	5,990	9,850
Guatemala	1,115	1,517	1,565	3,835	8,068	11,479
Honduras	968	1,017	974	2,997	6,747	13,282
México	16,114	13,724	11,768	13,974	17,240	11,577

*The fiscal year exists from October 1st of one year until September 30th of the next year.

**Until May 31st.

Source: US Department of Homeland Security.

Fleeing from gang violence?

Anxious to deviate from the attention from controversies about US immigration reform and rights of immigrants to be with their families, Biden emphasized the gang violence in Central America as the principal cause of adolescent migration and promised forty million dollars to finance social programs directed to prevent kids in vulnerable situations from falling into street gangs like La Mara Salvatrucha and Mara 18.

The United Nations estimates that there exist about 65,000 gang members in the three countries that make up what is known as the north triangle of Central America: El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Even though both drug and youth gangs are commonly cited as the main causes of violence in the region, there is a debate if the problem has worsened so dramatically in the last five months to the point to cause a 92% increase in child immigration.

The Guatemalan ambassador in Washington D.C., Julio Ligorria, described child migration as “a multifaceted phenomenon” that includes poverty, high levels of youth unemployment, natural desires of the children to be with their parents, as well as extended violence.

On one hand, Jose Guadalupe Ruelas, director of Casa Alianza Honduras, a non-governmental defense organization for children's well-being, affirmed that it's not an exaggeration to say that violence is provoking hundreds of kids abandon their homes. And when he speaks of violence, Ruelas refers to gang wars as much as the operations of so called "social cleanup" by military squads, which is the name of considered "undesirable" groups, whether it be gangsters or simple adolescents that wander the streets.

"The Hondurans are not searching for the American dream, they are fleeing from the nightmare of violence in Honduras. This year 102 children were executed, and in the last six months six massacres have been recorded. Organized people with resources are going along in expensive cars, balaclavas, armed with guns, and are murdering the poor boys and girls in Honduras", Ruelas told Noticias Aliadas.

Source **Spanish**:

<http://www.noticiasaliadas.org/articles.asp?art=7039>

Translated by **Riley Pentico**