

Migrant caravans flee U.S.-made crisis. Demand Biden let them in!

written by Greg Butterfield

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Guatemalan security forces repress Honduran migrants with tear gas and stun grenades in the town of Vado Hondo, Jan. 17.

While the eyes of the world were fixed on the presidential transition in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 17, the Guatemalan army attacked a caravan of 8,000 Honduran refugees trying to reach the U.S. border 2,400 miles away.

“In the town of Vado Hondo, in the department of Chiquimula, bordering Honduras, the security forces confronted the migrants with tear gas and stun grenades. The security officers charged the crowd with batons and sticks, and managed to stop the migrants from advancing beyond Vado Hondo. In the incident of violent repression, hundreds of people were injured,” [reported Peoples Dispatch](#).

People are fleeing terrible conditions under the repressive, drug-trafficking Honduran regime — put in power after a U.S.-engineered coup in 2009 — and a string of subsequent disasters, including hurricanes and the pandemic. They had managed to cross the border between Honduras and Guatemala the day before.

This brutal attack on women, men and children is deeply connected to both the outgoing U.S. administration of Donald Trump and the incoming one headed by Joe Biden.

Trump, of course, openly and with extreme cruelty condemned the caravans coming from Central America to the U.S.-Mexico border, which began in late 2018.

For more than two years, thousands of people from Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and other countries have remained in ramshackle conditions waiting for an opportunity to apply for asylum that never came. Thousands more were forced to return home to dangerous situations or seek whatever work they could find, stateless and homeless.

Others — including refugees from Haiti — have been waiting even longer.

Trump’s regime bullied and bribed Guatemala and Mexico to crack down hard on refugees and migrants.

But how different is the new Biden administration? In practice, so far, not much.

While speaking in more diplomatic language, the message from [Biden transition officials](#) to the refugees was the same: Don't come! And this posture encouraged the crackdown by the right-wing, U.S.-armed Guatemalan government.

By Jan. 19, both U.S. and Central American media reported that the caravan had been [largely dispersed](#) by the Guatemalan army repression. Only a handful of refugees reached shelters near the border with Mexico, where Mexican soldiers were also amassed to block the caravan.

Many people were bused back to Honduras, where they faced an unknown fate. Many more drifted away in smaller groups, seeking other ways forward, such as the dangerous trip across the Suchiate River.

Despite the repression, [two more caravans](#) of Honduran refugees are preparing to risk the trek in the coming weeks.

What Biden did and didn't do

Biden took office Jan. 20 and immediately [signed 17 executive orders](#) meant to reverse some of the most egregious Trump policies.

This included repealing the so-called Muslim Ban that blocked passport holders from several majority-Muslim countries from entering the U.S. and restoring the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program that provides a pathway to citizenship for undocumented residents (popularly known as "Dreamers") who arrived in the U.S. as children. And he stopped construction of Trump's "border wall" boondoggle.

Biden also ordered the Department of Homeland Security and immigration agencies to put a [stop to some deportations](#) for 100 days while their policies are "reviewed." However, the moratorium order is full of holes and leaves much of the discretion up

to agencies riddled with some of the worst white supremacist Trump backers.

The new U.S. regime has no plans to shut down or even curb the notorious Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) gestapo, only to “refocus” it on deporting people who are alleged to have committed crimes while in the U.S. and recent arrivals.

This was the same policy followed by the Obama administration when Biden was vice president and earned Obama the title “Deporter In Chief.” The Obama administration [deported more than 3 million](#) people.

The first few days of the new government also failed to address the horrific detention of migrants and refugees, including children, who have managed against all odds to cross the border into the U.S.

As for the caravans, an unnamed Biden transition official [told NBC News](#), “There’s help on the way, but now is not the time to make the journey.”

“Over time, the official said, the Biden administration plans to set up a way to safely process migrants at the border and allow asylum seekers to make their claims.”

Fighters for migrant and refugee rights are not convinced. “The 11 million [estimated undocumented workers in the U.S.] have seen this before,” said a [Jan. 20 statement from Movimiento Cosecha](#), “a Democratic Congress and president promising a pathway for all. And we saw 3 million deported and an absence of political willingness to fight for our families.”

Cosecha chapters across the U.S. carried out banner drops and other actions during inaugural week, vowing that “the community is not waiting for others to take action, we are leading the fight for dignity and respect.”

A banner appeared in Brooklyn, N.Y., on the morning of Inauguration Day that read,

“Democrats deport and detain too. Permanent protections now! Abolish ICE!”

Appeal from Honduran activist

On Inauguration Day, Lucy Pagoada-Quesada, a teacher and leading Honduran activist living in the U.S., issued an [open letter to President Joe Biden](#). Pagoada-Quesada represents Department 19 of Resistencia/LIBRE, the official North American chapter of the resistance movement in Honduras.

“You were vice president when, in 2009, the government of your party led by President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton supported the military coup in Honduras against our Constitutional President Manuel Zelaya Rosales,” she reminded Biden.

“In 2010, the U.S. government imposed on us Porfirio Lobo-Sosa, whose son Fabio Lobo is imprisoned in the U.S. for cocaine trafficking. In 2013, they also imposed on us the narco dictator Juan Orlando Hernández, whose brother Antonio (Tony) Hernández is imprisoned in New York for trafficking tons of cocaine and weapons to the United States. In 2017, the United States also imposed on us for the second time (and in an illegal reelection) the narco-dictator Juan Orlando Hernández (JOH),” Pagoada-Quesada wrote.

“It was from the moment that this violent narco-dictatorship of the National Party was imposed on us that our country, Honduras, plunged into the worst social, economic and political crisis in our history. It is for this reason and in the face of despair that the Honduran people flee in the massive exodus of displaced human beings called caravans. They do not come in search of the American dream but rather they flee from the nightmare that the United States has imposed on them.

“Like you and the North American people, we in Honduras are fighting to recover our democracy, justice and peace, which was destroyed by the 2009 coup d'état. And

this coming November 2021, we are going to hold presidential elections for the third time after that terrible historical moment that changed our lives.

"Therefore, the only thing we demand from your government is to allow us to decide at the polls and that our sovereign decision as a people be respected. Do not let your government intervene," Pagoada-Quesada told Biden. "And I assure you, that, in this way, your government will not have to face the massive exodus of people who are fleeing from Honduras in search of what was unjustly taken away from them."

It is the responsibility of workers in the U.S. to act in solidarity with our class siblings fleeing crises in Central America imposed by our own rulers. For more than a century, U.S. big business has plundered Honduras of its labor, and agricultural and mineral wealth. It imposed the Pentagon's Palmerola air base and successive right-wing regimes on the people.

We must demand an end to U.S. imperialist interference in Honduras and throughout the region, and reparations for the millions of people harmed as a result of the 2009 coup.

And for those already in motion, fleeing unbearable conditions, we must demand of Joe Biden: Let them in! Let them all in — with safe housing, free, quality health care, and guarantees against repression and family separation.



<https://www.struggle-la-lucha.org/2021/01/23/migrant-caravans-flee-u-s-made-crisis-demand-biden-let-them-in/>