



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing

A View from the Field: Migration in Honduras

**Thursday, September 10th, 2015
10 – 11 AM
2255 Rayburn House Office Building**

Opening Remarks by Rep. James P. McGovern

Good morning and welcome to today's briefing on the rights of migrants from Honduras. I'd like to express my appreciation to the panelists and their organizations for their heartfelt commitment and untiring efforts to support and empower vulnerable populations in Central America. I also want to recognize the Latin America Working Group for its many contributions to putting human rights at the center of U.S. foreign policy towards the region.

Last year more than 68,500 children traveled into the United States by themselves. All but a few thousand came from four countries: Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. Although the large number caught us all by surprise, the phenomenon was not new: more than 38,000 minors came over the border in fiscal year 2013, and more than 24,000 in fiscal year 2012. But still, the increase was dramatic, and entirely due to more kids from the northern triangle of Central America heading north, by themselves.

Since then, the U.S. government and we in the Congress have been debating what the response to this situation should be. One part of the discussion is about what's going on in Central America that motivates people to migrate, often through unauthorized channels, and what governments in the region are doing to protect their own citizens from choosing such a risky path. We know that migrants often fall victim to assaults, kidnappings and even assassination, and they are vulnerable to labor and sex trafficking and forced disappearance. What's going on at home to make taking such risks worthwhile?

The other part of the discussion is about what the U.S. should do in terms of its own migration policies. One thing the Obama Administration has been doing is deporting

undocumented migrants at record levels. Since FY2007, the number of Salvadorans removed has increased by 36%, the number of Guatemalans removed has increased by 110%, and the number of Hondurans removed has increased 37%. In FY2014, about 27,200 Salvadorans, 54,400 Guatemalans, and 40,700 Hondurans were removed from the United States. But what happens to those who are sent home, especially those who were fleeing violence to begin with? Are they protected as they should be, in keeping with international human rights norms?

Today we are joined by a group of human rights and migrant rights experts from the United States, Mexico, Guatemala and Colombia who undertook a verification mission in Honduras this past July to analyze the human rights situation specifically of Honduran migrants.

The mission traveled to the Guatemalan/Honduran border and visited reception centers for child, adolescent and adult migrants. It met with Honduran government officials; the U.S. and Mexican ambassadors; officials from UNHCR and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights officials; faith-based and humanitarian service providers; associations of families of disappeared migrants; Afro-Honduran leaders; and human rights and civil society organizations.

The panelists will share with us their observations about the factors driving migration from Honduras; the serious abuses of human rights that migrants are experiencing throughout the migrant route; and the conditions those deported from the U.S. or Mexico face upon arrival. They will also share with us their recommendations directed at the Honduran, Mexican and U.S. governments, and other members of the international community.

This briefing is especially timely for me, because I will be traveling to Honduras within the next few weeks to see for myself the conditions on the ground. But as Congress considers the Administration's proposal to significantly increase foreign assistance to the northern triangle, all of us have an interest in achieving a better understanding of what's going on in the region, and how the U.S. can best partner with other actors, including non-governmental organizations. We need to get this right.

The U.S. relationship with Central America has been deeply shaped and is still burdened by the consequences of the wars of the 1980s. We have a responsibility to make sure that this time our policies are human rights-based, and truly contribute to addressing the problems that make irregular migration seem more attractive and more possible than