

# United States: Biden Continues Trump's Policies on Refugees

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**Despite promises made during his election campaign, Biden in office is continuing Trump's policies on refugees fleeing the horrific conditions in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, conditions flowing from U.S. imperialist policies.**

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An article in the June 26 *New York Times* reported, "Human rights and immigration advocates have assailed the Biden administration for not doing enough in its first six months to reopen the border to asylum seekers, reunite unaccompanied children with families and provide the appropriate facilities to hold detained migrants.

"In a report released last week, the human rights group Amnesty International said .... 'Rebuilding an immigration system takes time, but nearly half a year in, the administration still needs to deliver promised change,' the report read. 'No matter the situation or who heads the administration, the government cannot get out of its human rights obligations.' "

Biden's policy was summed up by Vice President Kamala Harris after she recently visited Guatemala: "Don't Come!" she scolded would-be refugees.

On that trip, ostensibly to find out the "causes" of why people were fleeing those three countries to make the arduous and dangerous trek to the U.S. border to seek asylum, Harris did not visit the border.

Facing criticism for not doing so, she made a second trip, and made a four-hour visit to the border city of El Paso, Texas. She visited the Customs and Border Protection's processing center, and praised its officers as well as those of the notorious Border Patrol.

She did meet with young girls detained at the point of entry, and expressed sympathy with their plight, but failed to visit a tent complex at the nearby Fort Bliss military base, that houses detained children.

More than 14,000 child refugees are currently in the custody of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which has set up 15 emergency sites like the one at Fort Bliss to get them out of the over-crowded Border Patrol holding jails.

In an interview on Democracy Now, Fernando García, founding director of the Border Network for Human Rights, explained what the conditions at the Fort Bliss children detention center are like.

He explained that at Fort Bliss, a military base, there is no accountability or transparency. "Nobody can go into Fort Bliss without going through a number of filters. So access to that location is very difficult for media, but also for human rights organizations....

"What is the message that having children in a military base represents? .... Are they a danger to our society?....

"We have seen so many incidents of abuse inside that specific detention center.... We had people reporting back to us directly about the lack of food, healthcare, the lack of basic services to the point that teenagers, children, have decided to commit suicide because of the conditions in-side."

After Harris' trip to El Paso, HHS Secretary, Xavier Becerra, part of Biden's cabinet, did visit the tent city.

This what he said after: "I will agree with anyone who says that's not where you are going to do long-term care for a child. We get that. But it's far better than the deserts they were in. It is far better than an adult de-tention facility. And it is absolutely providing them, these children, with everything you would expect a child to get to provide for their basic needs and attention that they require."

It's "better than a desert". And we are supposed to believe him that these children are getting "everything they need", when reports from within that do manage to get out are that children have committed suicide, that there is poor food and a lack of healthcare and basic services.

When Becerra made his visit he was met by protests demanding that the "Children Be Set Free!" and the tent city closed. Fernando García helped organize this and many other protests at the site. The protest of Becerra took place the day before his interview on Democracy Now.

"We were protesting yesterday asking for all the detention centers to be closed, but also to reunify those children with their family members. Eighty percent of those children, unaccompanied minors, they have relatives in the United States that can receive them.... They should invest mostly on reunifying these children with their families, rather than building these [detention centers]."

Asked about the Biden Administration, García said, "At the political level from the White House, we do see a different narrative [from Trump]. Biden and Harris ... are saying that they are committed to have a digni-fied border, to humanize immigration.

"All of that is good. But that has not been translated to the ground."

In addition to not reuniting these children with their families already in the U.S., García said that there is another major issue, "Title 42", an order Trump issued in 2020, that has led to mass deportations of asylum seekers supposedly to stop COVID, targeting those from the three Central American countries.

Physicians for Human Rights say this is spurious because the U.S. continues to allow millions of Mexicans to cross the border weekly, and the virus is not under control in Mexico. Under Title 42 the refugees who cross the border are immediately deported by Border officers without any hearings on their cases.

Biden has so far refused to rescind Trump's edict, referring to the Center for Disease Control to when it will end, tacitly endorsing Trump's fake excuse.

García says "Title 42 is what I consider an illegal program that is expelling refugees, families and

children, without due process.” The protests that Becerra helped organize also included the demand to end Title 42.

In a recent ruling, the Supreme Court said asylum seekers who were previously deported and then reentered the U.S. can be detained indefinitely, even though many face violent persecution, torture and death in their home countries for trying to flee in the first place.

The ruling also allows the government to deprive them of the right to see a judge or have a bond hearing while their cases are resolved.

Harris’s trip to Guatemala was ostensibly to find out how to eliminate the causes of the refugee surge from there as well as El Salvador and Honduras. She didn’t even visit the governments of those two countries.

On her return, she never mentioned anything about “causes” and neither has Biden. What she probably was talking to the Guatemalan government about was its cooperation with Washington in trying to stop refugees from El Salvador and Honduras at the border, to prevent them from going toward the U.S.

It’s no secret why refugees, including children, are risking assaults, robberies, rape and harsh conditions in the long trek to the border: these three countries are rife with corruption, violence and oppression by their governments, mass violence from drug gangs, poverty, and more.

The conditions are exacerbated by the impact of climate change in the region. Drought has devastated family farming. Families, facing hunger and in some cases possible starvation, with no help from the governments, are fleeing north.

These governments are all aligned with the U.S. and indeed are the results of U.S. imperialist-backed wars and military coups against “communism” going back decades.

## **Guatemala**

In Guatemala, there was a revolution against a U.S.-backed military government in 1944, which ushered in a period of progressive government, that allowed free elections. In 1951 Jacobo Arbenz was elected president.

His regime was marked by legalizing the Communist Party, and launching a land reform that threatened the U.S. United Fruit Company and local landlords, to distribute land to the impoverished peasantry.

Alarm bells went off the Washington, which soon began plotting to overthrow the Arbenz government. This was accomplished by a CIA-led coup in 1954, which ushered in a harsh military dictatorship.

Resistance began to grow, leading to a civil war that lasted from 1960 to 1996. The U.S. of course supported the government defending landlords and capitalists against the lower classes’ resistance to a series of dictatorships. As a result, Guatemala was devastated, and hasn’t recovered to this day.

The current government, a “democracy”, is known as a serious violator of human rights, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detention, harsh restrictions on the press, intertwined with powerful criminal drug organizations and more killings, etc. etc. according to Human Rights Watch.

## El Salvador

A military coup backed by the U.S. in El Salvador in 1979 led to a 12 year civil war between the dictatorship and the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (a coalition of left groups).

It was marked by the terrorizing and mass murders of civilians including mass killings of indigenous peoples, murders of Catholic clergy (including Archbishop Romero and U.S. nuns who were also raped), labor and peasant leaders, and more by U.S.-trained death squads.

The military recruited child soldiers and committed other human rights violations.

Washington sent \$1-\$2 million per day to the military. By May 1983, U.S. military officers took over top positions in the El Salvadoran army and ran the war.

Some 75,000 were killed by the time of a U.N. sponsored peace agreement in 1992.

Without going into the history since, the "democracy" degenerated into the same conditions as Guatemala, with powerful criminal drug gangs killing young people who refuse to join them, poverty, etc. Today, the current president is building an increasingly authoritarian regime.

## Honduras

Honduras, long suffering a series of military dictatorships, became the staging ground for the U.S. to organize a counter-revolutionary army to wage war against the 1979 Sandinista revolution that overthrew the U.S.'s puppet dictator Anastasio Somoza, and formed a government based on the workers and peasants.

President Reagan sent a large contingent of troops to Honduras to do this. The country became a huge U.S. army base.

Jumping ahead to 2006, there were elections in Honduras resulting in Manuel Zelaya becoming president. His regime was progressive, and he attempted structural changes that would benefit the lower classes, although he was not a socialist.

When he sought to establish relations with Venezuela and the avowedly socialist Hugo Chavez, the Obama administration decided to remove him. Obama's Secretary of State was the point person for the operation.

She went to Honduras and made arrangements in June 2009 with the military to stage a coup a short time after her visit, that ousted Zelaya. Not knowing quite what to do with him, they brought him to the main U.S. army base. The U.S. told the military not to kill him, for fear of how that would look, but send him into exile.

Military-supervised elections were held and established a regime under its control. The result since has meant that Honduras has become a nar-co-state. The current president, Juan Hernandez, presides over a government completely tied into the drug cartels.

His brother, Tony, was arrested in 2019 in Miami, for bringing tons of drugs into the U.S. and was given a life term. Tony himself was previously in the government.

But the U.S. still gives Juan a clean bill of health.

Honduras today outdoes the conditions in Guatemala and El Salvador in corruption, violence, poverty etc. which explains why so many refugees from there continually endure the harsh conditions of trying to reach the U.S.

There is zero chance of U.S. imperialism addressing the causes of the surge of refugees from these three countries, since the source of those horrendous conditions is the U.S. itself.

What will likely happen is the U.S. will give millions of dollars to these re-gimes, not to the impoverished farmers and workers, under the ludicrous claim that such funds will address the issues, and not just line their pockets.

**Barry Sheppard**

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