

No Way Out: Migrants in Danger

A new report by *Médecins Sans Frontières* aka: **Doctors Without Borders** — shows how migration policies imposed by the United States and Mexico have trapped thousands of Central American migrants in dangerous conditions.

Called “**No Way Out**,” it is based on nearly 500 interviews with Central American migrants and asylum seekers, most of whom say they were victims of extreme violence prior to leaving their home country or along the migration route through Mexico. Because of the so-called Migrant Protection Protocols, which serve to deter immigration, asylum seekers are often forced to remain in Mexico, where they are often targeted by criminal groups.

AVRIL BENOÎT of MSF:

“What we found in the work that we’ve done — and we are offering mental healthcare in many of the areas that are along the migration route from the different Central American countries, but also working at the border, the northern border of Mexico, as people who are trying to reach the United States and/or have been sent back to the United States. What we find is that almost half of them have experienced some form of extreme violence — watching somebody from their family be killed, being kidnapped themselves, having to deal with the violent situations of their communities, of their neighborhoods — and they have fled that. They have legitimate reasons to try to find safety.

Where that safety is is not really for us to say, but we can say that sending them back or making them wait in that northern area of Mexico, where cartels are dominating, where cartels are exploiting them, where you’ve got criminal gangs that are kidnapping them and finding any which way to make money off of their presence, it’s almost like the United States policy of the Migrant Protection Protocols, or MPP, or “Remain in Mexico,” are almost like funding these cartels in a way, in indirect form, by sending these people back to be subjected to the kind of exploitation that’s happening.

So the suffering is real. It’s a huge concern of ours. We don’t have all the policy solutions. All we can say — and, you know, again, we’re not taking a political stance insofar as this party or this platform. What we’re saying is, you cannot expect people to be safe in an area that’s controlled by criminal gangs with a long history of killing people. This is not the place that people who are awaiting their asylum claims should have to stay, in shelters, in fragile situations, where they don’t even dare go out during the day, let alone at night.”

Even More Risk With Fears of a Pandemic

“It’s extremely concerning to us to have colleagues arrive on flights to support the efforts on the ground in a country and find that the local authorities have made a decision to quarantine them for 14 days. Fair enough that you have to quarantine people who are at high risk, who have symptoms, and the science around this, the understanding of the risks, is increasing over time. We appreciate that we all have to do our part to avoid the spread. But it’s going to be very difficult, even for us.

Think about it. There’s a run on surgical masks right now. How are surgeons supposed to get access to masks when everyone is gobbling them up and, you know, are buying them off the shelves in every warehouse imaginable? We have patients coming in for other ailments, even into hospitals here in the U.S., but because they might have coronavirus, they’re not getting the treatment they need to stay alive — dialysis or whatever else. You know, there’s a delay in the quick response, the normal quick response, of medical people, who are fearful of coronavirus. And we also know that with infection control and all the measures that we’ve acquired, you know, all that we’ve learned from outbreaks like the Ebola outbreak of West Africa and what we’re dealing with in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo now, is that even medical teams, hospitals, that you would think would know how to protect themselves, don’t.

So there’s a huge effort that must be taken seriously in terms of protection. But if the borders start closing, if people cannot flee war, if people cannot seek healthcare, even if the wall in front of them is the hospital that’s closed to them because they’re a suspected case, you can just imagine that this coronavirus will spread even more. any situation where we have an outbreak in a crowded area is going to be deeply problematic to deal with, and it will only compound the suffering that they’re experiencing.”

Avril Benoît
executive director of MSF USA.
Doctors Without Borders USA.

“Femicide exists. We Should Never, Ever Deny That”

On February 21st Hundreds of Women gathered in the streets of Tijuana, our neighboring city approximately 14 hours south across an international border. And lets just say Tijuana isn't known for its rose gardens, it's known for its alarming statistics of sex trafficking and the missing and murdered, specifically women. **TEN WOMEN A DAY ARE KILLED AND/OR GO MISSING with little to no justice.** And Women in Tijuana ... they are FED UP (to say the least) and PISSED OFF by the lack of action and willingness by the policia to seek justicia.

So they have been organizing.

Hundreds of women protested in the streets and took action in civil disobedience around Tijuana. Most women were sporting bandannas or balaclavas around their faces with either spray cans or homemade drums in hand.

Circulo Violeta Tijuana, a female fronted non profit that demands justice for women and the end of police repression, organized the recent march and spoke with me in a candid interview. (This interview was initially conducted in Spanish.)

What is your name and your mission?

My name is Carolina Barrales from Circulo Violeta, Tijuana. We are at Plaza Santa Cecilia and Circulo Violeta is a feminist collective.

What is the purpose of gathering here tonight?

Here in Mexico, in Tijuana, 10 women are murdered everyday.



To make visible femicides in Mexico, mainly in Tijuana, because this border is one of the busiest ports of entry in the world. The eyes of everyone are in this border that’s why we are protesting here.

Why do you think there were so many police when women gathered?

I think police repression has escalated mainly because of the protests in Mexico City, which are always more violent than here in Tijuana, whenever we’ve had protests here they’re always very peaceful and today we were found the border shielded and police following us everywhere.

I think the authorities and even Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador’s government is scared of feminists asking for justice which is something humane, so this government stands out for not taking sides on this issue and for repressing feminist protests and now it’s happening in Tijuana too.

What do you think it will take to get action? And what do you want to see happen?

What we want to see happen is justice, that all femicides be investigated as such, that every woman who is killed violently is investigated as femicide, that all cases of police abuse and sexual abuse be cleared up.

What do you want from people from the other side?

We want them to join us, to fight, that every woman that saw the live-streams joins us, we need to be together, this is not a war because if it were we would also kill 10 men a day, it’s sexist and its humiliating for us women.

Anything else you wanna say?

Thank you for being here and covering our protest.

Lauren Schmitt
AKA La Perrita

Second International Gathering of Women Who Struggle

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Organized by Zapatista women and held December 26-29, 2019, in autonomous Zapatista territory.

A transparent screen at the top of the gazebo allows for the films to be seen from many angles in the seedbed, while a fire dance gives way to many other massive dances that resound for hours in an atmosphere of joy and strength that nobody wants to, nor can, control.

“Life” - Day Three:

December 29 arrives and the cultural events begin with the first rays of sun. Here, where the only woman’s blood that is spilled is our menstrual blood, many interrupt their breakfast upon hearing the call to quickly join a dance in the shape of a conch. The dance is to remember those who saw their dream of fulfilling the agreement to live cut short, it is to personify our *compañeras* who are gone, lights extinguished by institutional or misogynist violence. The conch grows out of control and soon there are dozens of women performing a dance that screams the pain of others and revives them among the bodies of those of us who are here.

To unite and not to divide. To speak and to no longer be silent. To listen and to come together in respect for the other that we all are. Those are the tacit agreements we’ve been making without writing them down in meeting notes.

“We all learn about the proposals made here and make our own proposals regarding violence against women and what we will do to stop this serious problem we have as women.”

“When any woman anywhere in the world, of any age and any color asks for help because she has been violently attacked, we respond to her call and find a way to support, protect, and defend her.”

A joint action of women is proposed that all of us wear a black ribbon as a sign of our pain and sorrow for all of the disappeared and murdered women all over the world. This will be our way of saying to them, in every language, in every geography, and on every calendar: *“You are not alone. We feel your absence. You are missed. We will not forget you. We need you. Because we are women who struggle. And we will not give in, give up, or sell out.”*

With this commitment to life, with this respect and with this collective word, our gathering ends. *“We have one year, sister and compañera, to move this work forward. Let’s not return here next year amidst the same violence against women without ideas or proposals for how to stop it,”* they tell us. Here we were free for a few days. Here we were exactly the women that we are. For the children yet to come, or for the women and men who are no longer here, it will be up to all of us together to continue the dream of seeing this criminal system burn, learning from the past to forge and shape for ourselves, as women who struggle, the present and the future that we deserve.

Originally published in Spanish by Radio Zapatista and translated by Scott Campbell. Additional photos, along with audios, can be found with the original text.

Millions of Women World Wide Mark International Women’s Day.

In Mexico City, at least 60 people were wounded as riot police confronted protesters. Tens of thousands of women blocked the city’s main streets carrying signs that read “You’re killing us” and “We want to live without fear.” Others carried purple crosses with the names of victims of femicide. Today activists are calling for women across Mexico to stay out of public life and not participate in the economy as part of a national strike against gender violence.

In Chile, organizers estimate over 1 million women and allies took to the streets of the capital Santiago. In Colombia and Argentina, demands for legal abortion took center stage. In Guatemala, hundreds took to the streets to mark the third anniversary of the killing of 41 girls who were burnt alive for protesting sexual and physical violence at an orphanage. Protests also took place in the neighboring countries of El Salvador, Honduras and Costa Rica.

Large protests also took place in Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Spain, the U.S. and Pakistan. Marches in Turkey were met by police violence.

In Iraq, where mass anti-government protests have been taking place since last October, women marked the day at Baghdad’s Tahrir Square with red and white roses and purple protest banners.

International Women’s Day. A holiday with its origins in the labor and socialist movements of the 20th century, the day now recognized by the United Nations occasions rallies and events from Caracas to Baghdad to spotlight issues facing women globally.

This year, rallies in Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan were met with violence while marchers in Turkey and Chile were confronted by police. The COVID-19 outbreak forced cancellations while others boldly marched, defying fears of the epidemic.

This year’s International Women’s Day comes on the eve of a planned “women’s strike” in Mexico the next day . Spurred on by feminist activists, the strike in Mexico comes in the wake of intensifying protests and demands for government actions against the often grisly murders of women and girls in the country.

Government estimates say 10 Mexican women are killed daily with more than 3,800 killed last year alone. Many of those cases involve sexual assault. The strike calling on women to abstain from work and school for a day has gained traction, reaching far beyond the Mexico’s activist circles.

Marta Patricia Ramírez, a housewife, told the wire service she organized a neighborhood event to discuss harassment. Dentist Jessica Solis will keep her office closed. Marta Pérez told the AP she won’t lift a plate Monday and that her daughter will not go on social media.

The strike has also gotten the go-ahead from many large employers in Mexico. Walmart says its 108,000 female workers are allowed to join the action. Ford, banking and media company Grupo Salinas, and baked goods producer Bimbo are supporting the movement. 21 million women are registered as workers in Mexico.

In the days leading up to the strike, women have been out in force with thousands attending events. On Saturday a concert performed entirely by female artists packed Mexico City’s Zocalo, the metropolis’s main square. Attendees chanted “justice” as a singers performed the anti-femicide anthem, “Song Without Fear.” On Sunday, activists painted more than 3,000 names of victims across that same square.

From Reports of Democracy Now, NPR, AP, Washington post