

In violation of international law

Trump orders new attacks on rights of refugees, asylum seekers

By Norisa Diaz
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On Monday, President Donald Trump signed a presidential memorandum ordering Kevin McAleenan, the acting secretary of homeland security, and Attorney General William Barr to impose new restrictions and attacks on asylum seekers at the US/Mexico border.

The antidemocratic and illegal measures proposed by Trump include compelling applicants to pay asylum application fees, imposing new restrictions on work permits, and requiring that all asylum cases be settled within 180 days. The current backlog of cases totals over 800,000, with an average wait time of almost two years.

The memo also mandates that migrants who attempt unauthorized entry into the United States be barred from receiving work permits until their claims are adjudicated.

The memorandum paves the way for Border Patrol cops to replace US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) asylum officers in the initial credible fear interview process. These interviews are conducted to determine if migrants' fears of injury or death in their home countries are credible, allowing them to proceed and present their asylum cases before an immigration judge.

Trump has reportedly expressed anger and frustration over the relatively high proportion of asylum seekers who surmount this initial hurdle. He backs the recommendation of his fascistic immigration adviser Stephen Miller that the asylum officers who currently conduct the interviews be replaced by border cops, who will be more likely to block refugees from proceeding with their claims.

In line with his denunciations of impoverished workers fleeing violence and repression in their home

countries as "invaders" and "con men" supposedly gaming the system, Trump said in the memorandum: "The purpose of this memorandum is to strengthen asylum procedures to safeguard our system against rampant abuse of our asylum process."

The directives in the memorandum are mandated for enactment 90 days after issuance of the order.

The aim of these proposals, which violate international and national asylum laws and protocols, is to virtually end immigration into the US across the US-Mexican border. The memorandum follows a long line of attacks on immigrants, including family separations, the building of a network of immigrant detention centers, deliberately slowing the process of accepting asylum claims at ports of entry to a crawl, deploying active duty troops to the border, and declaring a national emergency to allocate Pentagon funds, in defiance of Congress, and mobilize the military to build a wall along the southern border of the US.

Earlier this month, Trump carried out a purge of top officials in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which oversees Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP), because, as he told reporters, "We want to go in a tougher direction." The firings included the dismissal of DHS Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen, who had implemented all of the administration's attacks on immigrants' rights but reportedly balked at resuming the forcible separation of immigrant children from their parents and carrying out measures that directly violate the law.

The same day that he signed the asylum memorandum, Trump tweeted, "The Coyotes and Drug

Cartels are in total control of the Mexico side of the Southern Border... They have labs nearby where they make drugs to sell into the US. Mexico, one of the most dangerous countries in the world, must eradicate this problem now. Also, stop the MARCH to US.”

Also on Monday, the Defense Department announced that Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan had approved a request by the DHS that the military send an additional 320 troops to the southern border, adding to the more than 6,000 already there in what has effectively become a permanent military presence.

The Democratic Party has facilitated the administration’s escalating anti-immigrant campaign by a combination of silence and complicity. In recent weeks it has shifted further to the right, adapting itself more directly and openly to Trump’s anti-immigrant policies.

It now echoes the White House’s talk of a “crisis” at the border that demands extraordinary measures. In fact, the so-called “crisis” is the result of Trump’s anti-asylum policies, which have forced desperate refugees to cross the border in more remote areas so they can turn themselves in to the border police and apply for refuge in the US. This is combined with the catastrophic social and political conditions in Central America caused by a century of US imperialist interventions, coups, CIA-trained death squads and US-backed dictatorships, by means of which the US ruling class has economically exploited the region and its working population.

In recent days, *New York Times* commentator Thomas Friedman has penned a column backing Trump’s border wall and his demand for a “merit-based” immigration system and Bernie Sanders has denounced “open borders” and warned of a flood of impoverished people coming into the US, supposedly threatening the jobs and wages of US workers.

On Tuesday, one day after Trump’s attack on the right to asylum, Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer met behind closed doors with Trump and emerged to praise the meeting as “productive” and reiterate their eagerness to work with the White House. Speaking to reporters, they did not say a word about Trump’s asylum memorandum or any other aspect of his anti-immigrant policy.

Responding to Trump’s memorandum, James Davis, an immigration attorney with Immigration Legal Services of Chula Vista, California, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that “what they are trying to do is close the door.”

He continued: “I fear that people will just be denied without a fair process. They don’t want so many credible fear interviews processed,” even though “they are nearly always denied.”

Davis added: “These people don’t have money. To charge a fee for asylum is a way to prevent people from being able to apply for asylum. Most asylum applicants have left everything behind and they come with nothing. The conditions they are fleeing have gotten so bad, they leave their home, their job, all their belongings except what they can carry on their backs.

“There are many cases where women, for instance, have been forced into servitude, raped and assaulted, even by border patrol and border agents. Everything has been taken from them and they have paid such a price. Now they say we are also going to require something more of you!

“This runs contrary to international asylum law. Asylum is based on humanitarian law. You cannot charge a fee for that.”

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