

Human Rights Watch report finds 138 Salvadorans killed after being deported from the US

By Adam Mclean
7 February 2020

Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a report on Wednesday titled “Deported to Danger: United States Deportation Policies Expose Salvadorans to Death and Abuse,” which found 138 cases of deported Salvadorans who were killed upon return to their country of birth between 2013 and 2019.

The report, which interviewed over 150 people over a one-and-a-half-year period additionally identified 70 other deportees who were beaten, sexually assaulted, extorted or tortured. These cases were collected largely from incidents that were previously reported in the media, meaning that the total number of deportees who were subsequently killed is likely much greater.

Those interviewed by HRW include a former Salvadoran policewoman who fled to the US after being threatened by gangs and was murdered several years after her deportation, a father of three who had lived in the US for several years and was shot dead two weeks after returning to El Salvador, a woman who fled sexual violence from a gang member and who was repeatedly raped by the same man upon her return, and two brothers who were accused by police of belonging to a gang and who were beaten for days in a police barracks without charge. Such is the brutality Central American refugees are fleeing from and cruelly forced to return to.

Many of those killed, including a number who were killed in the course of the study, chose to remain in El Salvador fearing that leaving the country or even their hometown would be enough to endanger them, their family or their friends. A number of others who stayed in the country nonetheless left their home and live in hiding.

Nearly everyone interviewed said that they were

fleeing violence from police, gangs or government death squads, the lines between which are often blurry. The report notes that the current national police director is under investigation for threats and links to drug trafficking and, referring to the state sponsored death squads, “extermination groups.”

Police violence is as rampant as it is egregious in El Salvador. According to the HRW report, “in 2019 the governmental Ombudsperson for the Defense of Human Rights in El Salvador (PDDH) reported that it had examined killings of 28 boys, 7 women, and 81 men... In 70 percent, [of the cases] witnesses said victims were unarmed. In 37 percent, witnesses saw police move the body or place or hide evidence. In 30 percent, PDDH concluded that the body showed signs of torture, including sexual assault.”

Originating in the Salvadoran Civil War, the Salvadoran “extermination groups” were used primarily against left-wing militants and continue to operate today. They are reported to either dress in all black or as police officers by those the HRW spoke to. According to the report, “Experts have shown that during and after the civil war, [they] were deeply rooted in the country’s security forces.”

The growing attacks on migrants is an international phenomenon in which no government is innocent. With Mexico’s acceptance of and cooperation with the “Remain in Mexico” policy, it is complicit in the crimes of the Trump administration. By knowingly deporting immigrants back to a country where they would face persecution and violence, let alone whipping up nationalism and xenophobia, the Trump administration has flouted the legal principle of non-refoulement and violated both international and

national law.

There is a double lie in the Trump administration's fascistic treatment of immigrants. While Trump utilizes dehumanizing rhetoric to slander and scapegoat immigrants, calling them everything from "rapists" to "insects," the US has directly and indirectly supported the most violent and right-wing forces in Central America who are largely responsible for the refugee crisis to begin with. The legacy of US imperialism's atrocities in Central America is precisely what created the conditions that are driving millions to abandon their homes and depart on a treacherous journey to an unknown country.

In the course of the Salvadoran Civil War, the Salvadoran army's Atlacatl Battalion carried out a massacre of some 800 civilians, the majority of whom were children, in the rural town of El Mozote in 1981. The Atlacatl Battalion was created by the US Army's School of the Americas and even received training at Fort Bragg in North Carolina. US Special Forces advisors operated with the unit in El Salvador, and, according to some accounts, were present during the December 1981 massacre. The El Mozote massacre was only the most infamous of that war. An estimated total of 75,000 were killed by such forces.

Neither the Democrats nor the Republicans are concerned about the peril facing deportees. While the terror directed towards immigrants in the US has substantially grown under Trump, the Obama administration broke records by deporting more immigrants than all 20th-century presidents combined.

The Obama administration also played a key role in the 2009 coup in Honduras. Despite international condemnation, the US refused to acknowledge what had happened as a military coup, allowing trade and financial aid to continue to Honduras. Mirroring the conditions in El Salvador, the country has since seen a poverty rate of around 70 percent, one of the highest murder rates in the world, the domination of the military and powerful gangs, and an outpouring of refugees.

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