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Children Deported from US Arrive in Central America

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Central American nations have received their first batch of citizens deported from the U.S. following raids on undocumented migrants.

On Wednesday, 10 children aged 2 to 17 along with their mothers were sent back to Guatemala after security forces found them living in the U.S. without the required residential documentation.

The group, who refused to speak to reporters upon landing, was flown to a military airport on the outskirts of the capital, Guatemala City, with some hiding their faces as they departed the aircraft.

Alfredo Vicente, whose niece and her two children were among the group sent back to Guatemala, told AFP that his niece had been working and living in the U.S. for two years before U.S. immigration officials arrested her in Atlanta.

"Here, there are no sources of work and we are asking them not to deport people. They were there working decently," he said.

The U.S. began a nationwide crackdown on migrants working and residing in the U.S. last week, with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) targeting adults and children whose deportation had been requested by immigration judges.

U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson said 121 adult and child immigrants were rounded up last weekend for deportation, and that more would be apprehended soon. The majority are from Central America.

Many of the Latinos targeted in President Obama's push are from three countries, collectively known as the Northern Triangle: Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, where drug trafficking, violence, corruption and poverty is rife.

Preliminary figures from police recorded 17,422 homicides in those three countries last year, an 11 percent rise over 2014. El Salvador has one of the highest murder rates in the world, with 104 violent deaths per 100,000 in recorded in 2015.

The raids are believed to be the first-large scale effort to deport more than 100,000 families who fled violence in Central America in recent years, the bulk of whom are asylum-seeking mothers and their children.

In an attempt to speed up the deportation process, the Department of Homeland Security announced it would appeal a decision that barred children arriving in the U.S. with their mothers from being held in so-called family detention centers. According to Johnson, the decision, and the resulting injunction, “significantly constrains” his department’s “ability to respond to an increasing flow of illegal migration into the United States.”

Immigration has been a hot topic in the presidential election race, with Republican front-runner Donald Trump calling a wall between the U.S. and Mexico and a ban on all Muslim immigration.

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