

## **Report Kidnapping Extortion Plague Migrants Traveling through Mexico**

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MEXICO CITY (CNS) -- A report released by the Mexican Diocese of Saltillo says that abuses such as kidnapping and extortion by organized crime groups have become the most serious problem for undocumented Central Americans traveling through the country.

The fifth annual report on the human rights situation for migrants transiting Mexico also says that government organizations, police officers and guards working for private security companies continue violating the human rights of migrants and continue ignoring complaints that highlight allegations of improper and possibly illegal conduct.

"The aggressions against migrants are not ending, but becoming more offensive, becoming more cruel," said Father Pedro Pantoja, director of the diocesan migrant shelter, Casa Belen, Posada del Migrante, in the northern city of Saltillo.

The report -- compiled by the shelter and two Saltillo migrant advocacy organizations, Humanidad Sin Fronteras and Frontera Con Justicia -- outlines a grim situation that has failed to improve over the past year, even though the Mexican government approved laws in 2008 that discard criminal penalties for those detained without proper immigration documents.

The report also comes as the migrant situation has been overshadowed in Mexico by crises that include a slumping economy, a wave of organized crime violence that has claimed more than 2,000 lives so far this year, and flu pandemic that shut down schools and businesses and has scared away tourists.

The report, compiled from interviews with migrants and observations from those working with migrants, includes allegations such as immigration officials carrying out the illegal pursuit of migrants hopping on northbound trains. Additionally, local police departments in several states and private security guards near railways are alleged to have demanded bribes from migrants riding and jumping off trains and fees for those wishing to climb aboard.

Father Pantoja told Catholic News Service May 25 that even more troubling is the move by organized crime groups -- some of which have ties to drug cartels -- into illegal activities such as the extortion and kidnapping of migrants. In the kidnapping cases, he said that migrants are targeted -- usually as they disembark trains or wait in bus stations -- because they lack legal protections and, although poor, can often call on relatives living in the United States to help pay ransoms.

"Migrants are poor, vulnerable, don't have many rights and (crimes against them) don't attract very much attention," Father Pantoja said.

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