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Central Americans Continue To Leave Home In Large Numbers: Notes On Recent Developments In Mexico

by Deborah Tyroler

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Mexican immigration authorities stationed in offices along the Guatemalan border note a significant increase in the numbers of undocumented Central Americans attempting to enter Mexico en route to the US. In response, the Mexican government has stepped up surveillance operations throughout the country and opened a new monitoring station in the state of Sonora. Sept. 18: Baltazar Mejia Gonzalez, chief of the immigration service (Direccion de Servicios Migratorios- DSM) in Chiapas, reported that agents detained 141 undocumented persons in three operations near the Guatemalan border. The official added that 23 smugglers ("polleros") had also been arrested. Sept. 19: Interior Ministry official Guillermo Turnbull Espinoza told Notimex that in Sonora state, the DSM has detained and deported 6,805 undocumented foreigners since Jan. 1. Total detentions in 1989 were 855. Turnbull Espinoza indicated that the vast majority of the undocumented are Salvadoran, Guatemalan and Nicaraguans headed for the US. Turnbull Espinoza maintained that detainees are transferred to Mexico City within 12 hours of arrest and then deported to their countries of origin. Prior to deportation, he said, the undocumented persons receive protection, food and medical attention. According to the official, "The detention center staff is trained to treat the foreigners as they should be treated, like people." He acknowledged, however, that abuses have occurred. Turnbull Espinoza said that a new immigration office has been installed in Guaymas, Sonora, to intercept undocumented persons using the Mexico City-Chihuahua route. In the past week, he added, 342 persons were detained in San Luis Rio Colorado, Sonora. Sept. 23: Immigration authorities have deported 60,000 undocumented persons thus far this year, the majority of whom were Central Americans. Of the total, 49,000 were detained at the Mexico-Guatemala border crossing at Tapachula. Another 6,000 detentions were recorded in Tabasco, 1,000 in Yucatan, and over 4,000 in Chiapas and other border crossings. DMS official Leonardo Gonzalez Trevino said that stepped up military actions in Central America have caused ever greater numbers of people to flee the region. He added, "They see Mexico as an option for survival (or as) the bridge to the US." Hugo Miguel Ayala Morales, DMS office chief in Tabasco, said that travel agencies swindle the undocumented, claiming they offer legal passage to the US across the Mexican border. Such agencies constantly change location in order to avoid detection by authorities or by the undocumented persons they have robbed. According to Ayala Morales, Guatemalans pay smugglers from \$180 to \$900 to transport them across the border, and Salvadorans and Hondurans pay \$1,000 per person. Sources at the Salvadoran consulate in Tapachula told Notimex that 12 undocumented Salvadorans have died in accidents en route to the US thus far this year. Sept. 25: The US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) has appointed Michael Trominsky as its new regional director. Trominsky is the former chief of INS intelligence operations in Central America and Mexico. Director of the Border Association for Central American Refugees (BARCA), Ninfa Ochoa Krueger, told Notimex that a group of Evangelical ministers complained to Trominsky about the sexual harassment of female refugees detained at the Bay View detention center. Ochoa Krueger said that Trominsky promised to investigate the charge. (Basic data from Notimex, 09/19/90, 09/21/90, 09/23/90, 09/25/90)

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