

U.S. deports Mexicans far from border to deter their return



Mexico City, December 20 (RHC)-- The United States began flying Mexican deportees to the interior of Mexico on Thursday and a senior U.S. official said Mexicans seeking U.S. asylum could be sent to Guatemala, as the Trump administration seeks to further limit border crossings.

The flight carrying Mexican deportees from Tucson, Arizona, landed in Guadalajara around midday. One immigration shelter in the city said it had been informed of a likely influx of deportees. The number of Central American migrants apprehended at the border fell sharply in the second part of 2019 after Mexico deployed National Guard troops to stem the flow, under pressure from Donald Trump.

With fewer Central Americans at the border, U.S. attention has turned to Mexicans crossing illegally or asking for asylum. Acting Deputy U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Ken Cuccinelli said an agreement that sends U.S. asylum seekers to Guatemala to request U.S. refuge could also apply to Mexicans and other nationalities.

"As we fully implement the agreement, all populations are being considered, including Mexican nationals," Cuccinelli said on Twitter. Mexico's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Mexico said it had requested the flights to keep deportees away from dangerous border cities, while a senior DHS official said the flights were in response to rising numbers of Mexican nationals arrested at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Mexicans made up nearly half of all migrants arrested between October and December, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection data. The flights could be scaled up quickly in the coming weeks, said the DHS official, who was not authorized to speak publicly. The Mexican foreign ministry said the flights would begin on a regular basis in January.

The U.S. official added the return flights may expand beyond Guadalajara, Mexico's second-biggest city, to other parts of Mexico. The United States has in recent years mainly deported Mexicans to border towns, although in the past it also flew them to cities in the interior.

So far, the United States managed to pressure El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras to sign partial agreements so U.S. President Donald Trump could implement a new rule that would deny asylum to migrants and return them to Central America.

The Trump rule requires asylum-seekers to first seek safe haven in a third country they pass through on the way to the United States. Immigrant rights organizations have sued to stop the rule, but the U.S. Supreme Court has allowed it to remain in effect pending trial.

According to the 1951 Refugee Convention -- which is a binding document for all the United Nations members -- any country can refuse to grant asylum to migrants and send them to a country that is considered "safe" for their lives.

The U.S. has started deporting asylum seekers back to Guatemala, despite the country's well-documented high rates of drug-related violence and poverty.

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