

Bodies of migrants who died in Texas truck returned to Mexico

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Mexico City, July 15 (RHC)-- After days of preparation and donations to cover funeral costs, a mountain community in eastern Mexico on Thursday mourned the return of three teenagers who were among the 53 migrants who died inside an abandoned truck in southern Texas last month.

Residents of San Marcos Atexquilapan have stepped forward to help the Olivares family receive the bodies of brothers Jair and Yovani Valencia Olivares, aged 19 and 16, as well as their cousin, 16-year-old Misael Olivares.

Women cleaned banana leaves to make tamales, men carried chairs from one house to another, while the boys' friends plastered a wall with photos of all three. Similar scenes of solemn preparation played out across Mexico as the bodies of 16 of those lost in the tragedy were brought back on two military flights on Wednesday and then sent to their hometowns. At least one more flight was planned for Thursday.

Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it would bring back 25 of Mexico's 26 victims in accordance with their families' wishes. The repatriation of the victims was expected to continue in the coming days in Guatemala and Honduras, which also lost 21 and six people, respectively.

Ten of the 53 victims were teenagers, including the Olivares. In the darkness, men carried the caskets and arranged them side-by-side before a large crucifix sheltered by tarps strung up above the mourners. The youths will be buried on Friday.

Hundreds of people from the area flocked to the families' homes, which sit in a row. The teens all played on a local football team and were well known. "I can't accept it," whispered Yolanda Valencia, the mother of Jair and Yovani.

Her sons wanted to build a house and open a shoe store in this town of about 1,500 people known for its shoemaking. "They went with a lot of goals that weren't realised," she said.

The investigation continues into the smuggling ring that ultimately abandoned the trailer of people in the sweltering heat on the outskirts of San Antonio on a day temperatures neared 38 degrees Celsius. U.S. authorities have arrested four people, including the truck's driver.

The truck was carrying 67 people, according to Garduno at Mexico's National Migration Institute. U.S. authorities said at the time that survivors found in the trailer were transported to the hospital for heat stroke and exhaustion. During a meeting with his Mexican counterpart, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, earlier this week, U.S. President Joe Biden called migration a "hemispheric challenge" for the Americas.

"My administration is leading the way to creating work opportunities through legal pathways," Biden said, adding that Washington issued a record 300,000 temporary visas for Mexican workers last year.

But the U.S. has been widely criticised by rights groups and migration advocates who say the country's deterrence policies put migrants and asylum seekers at greater risk when they transit.

For his part, Lopez Obrador called for an "orderly migration flow and allowing arrival in the United States of workers, technicians and professionals of different disciplines".

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