

# *Hundreds of migrants kidnapped in Mexico before crossing into U.S.*

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El Paso, December 19 (RHC)-- Hundreds of people who crossed the border into Texas this week have recounted multiple kidnappings as they made their way to the United States. According to testimony from the kidnapped people cited by Reuters, people were taken to at least two main locations and held against

their will while ransoms were demanded.

Most of the kidnapped migrants were reportedly Nicaraguans who are encouraged by the knowledge they are unlikely to be immediately deported due to frosty relations between their government and Washington.

On Saturday, the mayor of the Texas border city of El Paso declared a state of emergency, citing the hundreds of migrants sleeping on the streets in cold temperatures and the thousands being apprehended every day. The city is said to be bracing for a possible jump in migrant arrivals after a U.S. judge ordered COVID-era border restrictions to end by Dec. 21.

In late August, U.S. authorities in El Paso launched a busing program that sent nearly 14,000 migrants to New York and Chicago. The Biden administration expelled Venezuelans back to Mexico under an order known as Title 42 which imposed COVID-era border restrictions.

Four migrants told Reuters that people in police uniforms stopped the buses they were traveling in and attempted to extort them for between 200 pesos (\$10) and 5,000 pesos (\$255). Entire busloads were taken by armed men to nearby farms where they were held against their will.

Mexico's Migration Institute (INM) said that along with the Army and National Guard it had freed more than 250 people from a property in a border town. In another incident, six migrants described being held captive for several days before they were rescued along with hundreds of other migrants by Mexican federal law enforcement.

Local officials said the group of kidnapped migrants totaled about 1,500. Their kidnappers rationed meager food and water among them and yelled at them to stay quiet as they spent chilly nights sleeping on floors without blankets.

Stephanie Leutert, an immigration expert at the University of Texas at Austin, said the incident is one example of what the people go through in the hope of greener pastures in the United States. "This kidnapping and others show the risks that migrants face in Mexico and all the different groups trying to make money off of them," she said.

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