

Human rights group condemns U.S. governor for further militarizing Texas-Mexico border



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Austin, December 27 (RHC)-- A human rights group has denounced Republican Texas Gov. Greg Abbott for pulling "another political, inhumane stunt" by deploying National Guard troops to El Paso and "further militarizing the southern border, terrorizing border residents and vulnerable migrants."

The Border Network for Human Rights (BNHR) was referring to Abbott's decision to use "state resources to promote a racist, anti-refugee, xenophobic agenda" after Democratic El Paso Mayor Oscar Leeser declared a state of emergency last Saturday in an effort to prevent unhoused asylum-seekers from freezing to death.

"Our country desperately needs a comprehensive and updated immigration reform and asylum system. The city of El Paso's declaration of emergency was an attempt to enable the city to access much-needed resources to help the arriving vulnerable migrants at the border," BNHR executive director Fernando Garcia said in a statement.

"For the past few days, our community and nation have witnessed children, women, and entire families sleeping on the streets, suffering from extremely harsh, cold weather," said Garcia. "Those images are a reflection of our broken and inhumane immigration system, fueled by our federal government's inaction in supporting nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other entities who stand ready to welcome asylum-seekers."

El Paso Times reported that while Leeser had "long resisted issuing a state of emergency declaration... the sight of people on downtown streets with temperatures dipping below freezing" inspired his decision, which was made to allow the city to tap into the state's more abundant humanitarian and logistical resources.

"El Paso Deputy City Manager Mario D'Agostino said the state emergency declaration would give the city more flexibility in operating larger sheltering operations and provide additional transportation for arriving asylum-seekers," the newspaper reported. The city "requested additional personnel for feeding and housing operations, additional busing operations, and state law enforcement."

But Garcia noted that "rather than assisting in humanitarian and logistical support," Abbott is using Leeser's declaration "to feed into the racist, xenophobic, and white supremacist rhetoric of 'an invasion' by militarizing our city further and effectively imposing his illegal Operation Lone Star."

As The Texas Tribune, which has reported extensively on the right-wing governor's militarized border crackdown, explains:

Abbott launched Operation Lone Star to ramp up security along the Texas-Mexico border in March 2021, citing insufficient policies from the federal government. He announced that the state would deploy resources from the Department of Public Safety and the National Guard. The Texas Legislature dedicated nearly \$2 billion toward the effort. But the operation has been mired in controversy; National Guard troops have called it a disaster, and migrants arrested on state trespassing charges have gotten caught in confused legal proceedings, their lawyers citing due-process violations.

Garcia said that BNHR is "outraged to learn of the arrival of the Texas National Guard... who have staged military vehicles and razor wire at the Rio Bravo." The organization demands "the immediate withdrawal" of soldiers from the area, he added, "and the halt of any immigration strategy that further militarizes our border."

When he announced the emergency declaration last Saturday, Leeser said that supplementary humanitarian aid would only become more necessary after Wednesday, when Title 42 expulsions were scheduled to end and as many as 6,000 daily apprehensions and street releases were expected.

However, U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts on Monday granted a request from 19 GOP-led states to temporarily block the Biden administration from lifting the Title 42 public health order that has been weaponized to expedite the removal of asylum-seekers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In its Tuesday filing, the Biden administration asked the high court to issue a final decision by Friday. "The solution to the border situation has never been more evident," Garcia said Wednesday. "Our country desperately needs a comprehensive and updated immigration reform and asylum system."

"BNHR calls for much-needed investments to establish a welcoming infrastructure at the border," said Garcia, who proposed the establishment of new "Ellis Island welcoming centers" around the border to "provide the necessary services and legal support that asylum-seekers and refugees desperately need."

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