

# *Guatemala issues emergency decree as new migrant caravan approaches*

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Guatemala City, March 31 (RHC)-- Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei decreed a "State of Prevention" along the country's border with Honduras, amid reports that a new migrant caravan is forming in Honduras. The emergency decree would restrict open-air gatherings and demonstrations without permits, and will be in effect for two weeks in the five Guatemalan provinces along the border with Honduras.

The government tried to justify the restrictions in a statement, saying: "Groups of people could put at risk the life, liberty, security, health, access to justice, peace and development" of Guatemalans.

According to Reuters news agency, witness and local news reports, several hundred Hondurans set off for the Guatemalan border on Tuesday morning, seeking to reach the United States to escape the impact

of the coronavirus pandemic and natural disasters.

The migrant caravan in Honduras, mostly young adults with backpacks and women carrying children, began walking in the early morning from a bus terminal in the northern city of San Pedro Sula to the town of Corinto at the Guatemalan border.

“You have to take risks to have a better life in the United States; in Honduras we’re never going to do anything,” migrant Carlos Flores told a local television station. “Here you can hardly eat with what you earn, if you can even find work.”

Guatemala issued a similar decree in January to stymie a previous caravan, arguing it represented a public health risk amid the coronavirus pandemic. During the previous attempt in January, Guatemalan police and soldiers launched tear gas and wielded batons and shields to stop a group of about 2,000 Honduran migrants at a roadblock.

Several caravans of mainly Honduran migrants have tried to cross Guatemala and Mexico to reach the U.S. border, though none has succeeded since 2019. Central Americans have made up the bulk of a sharp increase in migrants trying to reach the United States through Mexico in recent weeks, putting pressure on U.S. President Joe Biden. The crisis includes the arrival of thousands of unaccompanied children who have crossed the US-Mexico border.

U.S. authorities reported more than 100,000 encounters on the southern border in February, the highest since a four-month streak in 2019.

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