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Delegation of Immigrant and Advocacy Groups Denounce U.S. Latest Efforts to Further Externalize U.S. Border to Panama

PANAMA — Last Monday, the U.S. and Panama [signed](#) an agreement in which the U.S. government will provide funding through the Department of State to Panama to support the deportation of migrants and the screening of asylum seekers who cross the Darién Gap. The Biden administration's latest agreement aims to move the U.S. border further south and uphold failed deterrence policies. The newly elected Panamanian president has already ordered the installation of barbed wire fences in the Darién jungle, an action which will not deter or stop migrants, but only make their journey ever more perilous.

In response, a coalition of advocates from Witness at the Border, Quixote Center, Human Security Initiative, Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center (Las Americas), Immigrant Defenders Law Center (ImmDef), and Red Franciscana para Migrantes in Panama, who recently released a new report titled "[DANGER IN THE DARIÉN GAP: Human Rights Abuses and the Need for Humane Pathways to Safety](#)," shared the following quotes:

“The US Government is effectively outsourcing the same playbook of inhumane deterrence policies that have proved to be ineffective at our own southern border to the government of Panama. This is a disgrace and a violation of basic human rights,” said **Karla Barber** at **Witness at the Border**.

“Migrants from across the globe are fleeing their countries as a result of violence, human rights abuse, and extreme poverty. Unfortunately, the United States has chosen to fund punitive enforcement measures against vulnerable migrants instead of working to address the issues that cause people to flee. Gangs and cartels terrorizing people in their home countries are able to purchase weapons, legally and illegally, in the United States and then traffic them throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Border enforcement should begin with ending weapons trafficking and addressing other root causes of migration. Deportation flights and other punitive measures only make the journey more dangerous for vulnerable and traumatized migrants,” said **Kim Lamberty, Executive Director at Quixote Center.**

“Rather than apply much-needed funding to humanitarian efforts along the U.S./Mexico border, the Biden Administration has elected to send money to Panama to allow them to send back to danger thousands of individuals. This ignores the human right to seek protection outside your home and forces vulnerable families into the hands of human smugglers, traffickers, and corrupt government officials. The agreement with Panama violates our country’s legal obligations and directly discriminates against disenfranchised and impoverished individuals who do not have access to other means of seeking refuge,” said **Jennifer Babaie, Director of Advocacy and Legal Services at the Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center (Las Americas).**

“The United States should use resources to protect migrants and asylum seekers rather than expend them to return people to danger. Without giving individuals and families the opportunity to have their cases heard, many people will be returned to torture and possibly die. The United States should uphold its promise in the Los Angeles Declaration to ‘create the conditions for safe, orderly, humane, and regular migration and to strengthen frameworks for international protection and cooperation.’ It is our moral and legal obligation to protect asylum seekers, not fund their demise,” said **Margaret Cargioli, Directing Attorney of Policy and Advocacy at Immigrant Defenders Law Center (ImmDef).**

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