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NEW REPORT Underscores Need for Additional Legal and Safe Pathways for Migrants and People on the Move in the Americas/Panama and U.S.

A link to the report can be found [here](#)

PANAMA — On World Refugee Day, 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, released a new report titled "*[DANGER IN THE DARIÉN GAP: Human Rights Abuses and the Need for Humane Pathways to Safety](#)*." The report focuses on current migration through the Darién Gap as witnessed during a week-long visit to Panama in March 2024 and the U.S.-led deterrence policies that can exacerbate human rights abuses, deadly environmental hazards, and the criminalization of critical humanitarian aid.

Interviews and surveys with over 30 migrants, asylum seekers, and aid workers, outlined in the report, reveal a perilous migratory journey marked by violence, exploitation, and environmental hazards through the Darién Gap, a stretch of dense jungle connecting Colombia and Panama. Cartels and criminal elements, possibly with the complicity of corrupt Panamanian SENAFRONT officers, are responsible for systemic violence, including sexual assaults and robberies.

The report's findings, which are consistent with those of other human rights organizations, support calls for the Panamanian government to protect vulnerable migrants and asylum seekers and seek accountability for abuses, including those committed by Panamanian government officers. Additionally, the report calls on the United States government to cease harmful deterrence policies and implement policy changes, such as expanding humanitarian parole programs, to welcome migrants and asylum seekers with dignity.

Report to be made available in Spanish on June 28th, 2024.

The authors of the report shared the following reflections regarding the report's findings:

"The human suffering we witnessed in Panama is avoidable. The current system and the policies that enable it need a complete overhaul. We need a paradigm shift that treats and welcomes migrants with dignity," said **Karla Barber** at **Witness at the Border**.

"The suffering we witnessed in the Darién Gap is the predictable consequence of restrictive immigration policies that force migrants and asylum seekers into dangerous terrain where they are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The United States, Panama, and other regional governments must take action to protect people seeking safety across borders," said **Julia Neusner**, Director at the **Human Security Initiative**.

"For decades, advocates and impacted communities have sounded the alarm on the brutality of policies based on deterrence tactics, including strict visa requirements and militarized borders. Not only do these lead to further dehumanization of people on the move and expose them to dangerous migratory journeys and human rights abuses, they do nothing to resolve the underscoring issues. The findings in this report are further proof of this. On World Refugee Day and every day, we urge the United States and other governments in the hemisphere to focus on policies that provide safe, legal pathways for those seeking refuge. Preserving human rights should be the minimum standard," said **Jennifer Babaie**, Director of Advocacy and Legal Services at the **Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center (Las Americas)**.

"On World Refugee Day, we must remember our moral and legal obligations to protect all people, including families and children, who are forced to flee their homelands in search of protection. We must endeavor to keep all asylum seekers both mentally and physically safe while they journey from the Darien Gap to the United States' southern border. We must expand lawful migration pathways in the United States, including humanitarian parole programs for people escaping harm, as sensible measures that save lives. And we must never forget that asylum is a human right," said **Margaret Cargiol**, Directing Attorney, Policy and Advocacy at **Immigrant Defenders Advocacy Center (ImmDef)**.

“Saint Francis of Assisi's choice was to care for the most vulnerable of his time: the poor and, among them, lepers. Similarly, the Franciscan Network for Migrants in Panama will continue to accompany the lives and desires of people who are forced to leave their countries of origin in search of better living conditions. As Franciscans in Panama, we want the rights of people on the move to be respected and for States to commit to safeguarding their lives. Immigration policies must be executed without xenophobic interests or hatred, but from a human, fraternal and supportive vision. That is why we categorically reject any violation of Human Rights, anything that threatens the life and integrity of migrants and refugees. We believe that borders should be spaces of solidarity meeting. Building walls or closing borders only aggravates the situation. We are brothers and sisters, and as such, we must treat each other with respect and compassion,” said **Rafael Lara** with **Franciscan Network for Migrants**, Panama.

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