

Written by Mariel Pérez
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Migrants' rights defender Alberto Xicotencatl Carrasco painted this picture of Mexican society's mixture of terror and denial in the face of grisly crimes and widespread human rights abuses committed against Central American migrants in transit through Mexico. In late March, the Latin America Working Group Education Fund hosted a delegation of five courageous Mexican migrant rights defenders here in Washington to shed light on how policies and conditions on both sides of the border have contributed to a surge in violence against migrants, as well as an uptick in targeted threats and violence against those who promote and protect the rights of migrants. The group's busy week in D.C. included meetings with the State Department, Congress, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Homeland Security. The delegates also spoke at public events held at the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) and the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) to educate D.C. advocates about the human rights situation of these transiting migrants— and steps that we all must take to bring about an end to this pervasive violence.

To provide a brief snapshot of what we learned from these defenders, here is an excerpt from the testimony shared by Alberto Xicotencatl Carrasco:

Alberto Xicotencatl serves as the director of the migrant rights center Border with Justice in Saltillo, Coahuila (a city located approximately 3 hours south of the border with Texas). The center works to defend the rights of migrants, serving many U.S.-bound Central American migrants traveling through Mexico. The program provides shelter, education, and health services to more than 12,000 migrants a year.

You can read the full transcript of the testimonies of each of the three speakers in [English](#) or [Spanish](#)

“All of us here with you today are dedicated to defending the rights of migrants in the context of violence and insecurity that impacts much of Mexican society. Very few people living or passing through Mexico remain safe. Indeed, violence against migrants is just one piece of a much larger problem of violence and the disintegration of the rule of law in Mexico. Nevertheless, Central American migrants are particularly vulnerable because they are forced to travel in secrecy. Due to the extremely hard-line immigration policies in Mexico, it's impossible for migrants to receive an immigration document that would permit legal and regulated travel. Now, Mexican immigration policy forces migrants to travel clandestinely—passing through areas

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where organized crime thrives and operates with impunity, places hidden in the shadows, so to speak.

“All of this forces migrants into a situation where criminals can take advantage of them to make a profit. In other words, the point here is money. And that money is buying complicity from the federal police, the municipal police, as well as high public officials. Public officials are making a living off of their collusion with organized crime; they themselves are participating and benefiting from these human rights abuses. And one of the primary ways organized crime profits off of migrants is through kidnappings and extortion.

“One of our leading concerns in this work is the extreme degree of suffering experienced by those who are kidnapped. Our migrant shelter in Saltillo serves approximately 12,000 to 14,000 people per year, and unfortunately, stories of abuse are quite common. Two years ago, we issued our first report on kidnapping, in which we wrote about this violence and the cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment which ranges from rape, to the amputation of limbs, to burning people alive. We thought that both the Mexican State and Mexican society would be shocked and outraged, but they weren't. Living amid such violence every day has made Mexican society indifferent. People are nervous, people are scared, and people are denying the reality in Mexico. People do not want to know the truth and the Mexican government is taking advantage of that fact.

“One year ago, those of us working with migrants were outraged by what we saw happening. We thought that we had reached the end limit of violence and cruelty that could be committed against a human being. However, it's terrible because, when it seems that we have reached the limit, there is always more. There are always other ways to cause more pain and suffering; there are always ways to instill greater terror and fear in migrants who are kidnapped so that they will give the telephone numbers of their families here in the U.S. so that they, in turn, can pay the ransom. When we began documenting kidnappings, \$300 was the minimum amount that was paid as ransom. In two and a half years, the minimum ransom has increased to \$3,000.

“When the kidnappers discover that a migrant's family has the economic means to pay a ransom, that person is sold multiple times within the same gang but in different points around the country. For example, if a migrant is kidnapped in the south of Mexico, he or she is extorted, and then sold to a gang in the center of the country. If that gang successfully extorts the migrant, the person is sold to yet another gang on the border. So, we are seeing that this phenomenon, far from diminishing, far from disappearing, is becoming a more common practice.

“As Mexican society, we face a serious challenge: restoring the social fabric in Mexico. There isn't a sense of community. The sense of support and solidarity is disintegrating because people are afraid of one another. It is because of these factors that we face a huge challenge as a community, a huge challenge for migrants, and a huge challenge for the population in general.”