



Jesuit Conference
Office of Justice and Ecology



Kino Border Initiative
Iniciativa Kino para la Frontera

Jesuit Organizations Denounce Continuing Attacks on Asylum in the United States

A Statement from the Leaders of the Ignatian Solidarity Network, the Jesuit Conference Office of Justice and Ecology, Jesuit Refugee Service/USA and the Kino Border Initiative:

We are deeply concerned by the Biden Administration's persistent attempts to restrict the right to seek asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border. Working on the ground with migrants and asylum seekers, we see firsthand how these punitive policies expose already vulnerable people to further danger. Informed by this witness and our Catholic faith, which affirms the inherent dignity of all people, we urge the Administration to end these barriers to asylum.

Three years ago, the Trump Administration used the COVID-19 pandemic as a spurious rationale to begin expelling migrants from the U.S. without any opportunity to claim asylum. Although President Biden campaigned on a promise to restore asylum, his Administration instead expanded the application of Title 42, even long after most pandemic-related restrictions in the country had ended.

In preparation for the anticipated ending of Title 42 this coming May, the Biden Administration has now announced new policies that will make it much more difficult for many people who are fleeing persecution to obtain asylum. These proposals move U.S. immigration policy in precisely the wrong direction and would return many people to danger. We regularly hear first-hand stories of extortion, abuse of power, and crimes committed against migrants and asylum seekers returned to Mexico and elsewhere.

Based on both sides of the Arizona-Sonora border, the Kino Border Initiative encounters many of these cases, such as that of Jaime*, who fled Venezuela with his wife. They arrived in Piedras Negras, Coahuila, where they were able to schedule an appointment through CBPOne, but the only available appointment was in San Ysidro, Baja California, over 1,200 miles away. While traveling to San Ysidro by bus, the entire family was kidnapped, tortured and extorted by a criminal group for 20 days.

One night at 3 A.M., Jaime and his family were blindfolded, put in a truck and taken to the border wall. Their kidnapers told them to walk across the border into the U.S., threatening to kill the family if they tried to come back to Mexico. After Jaime and his family crossed, they were apprehended by Border Patrol. They explained that they had missed their CBPOne appointment while being held hostage and were forced to cross into the U.S. by their kidnapers. The agent responded that they were criminals because they had crossed illegally. Within a few hours, Border Patrol expelled them to Nogales, Mexico.

The Biden Administration's exclusionary approach will inevitably lead to more of these tragedies, and it not only raises significant human rights concerns, but also fails to address the root causes of migration. [As Bishop Mark J. Seitz](#) recently stated, such policy "perpetuates the misguided notion that heavy-handed enforcement measures are a viable solution to increased migration and forced displacement. Decades of similar approaches have demonstrated otherwise."

While the U.S. has the right to regulate its borders, this effort cannot come at the expense of people in desperate need of protection. Shrinking asylum access serves only to jeopardize migrants. Rather than

designing policy to keep as many people as possible out of the U.S., our faith calls us to design policy to ensure that we as a country can offer protection to those in need.

Jesus himself knew what it meant to be a migrant fleeing persecution. Our faith is clear: It is our responsibility to care for the most vulnerable among us, regardless of social status or nation of origin. As Pope Francis has said, "Migrants and refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity. They are people in need of humanitarian assistance, legal protection and loving solidarity."

We cannot allow indifference and fear to divide us based on the conditions of our birth. We call on President Biden to withdraw and dismiss consideration of any policy that creates new barriers for the vulnerable and to implement a fair and humane asylum system, in accordance with the teaching of our faith and the long-established values of our country.

Christopher G. Kerr

Executive Director, Ignatian Solidarity Network

Rev. Ted Penton, SJ

Secretary, Jesuit Conference Office of Justice and Ecology

Joan Rosenhauer

Executive Director, Jesuit Refugee Service/USA

Joanna Williams

Executive Director, Kino Border Initiative

**Jaime's name has been changed to protect his identity*