

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

Refugees seek asylum

Thousands of refugees, especially from Guatemala, are giving Mexico a "human rights" problem.

The fall in oil sales isn't the only thing that has been bothering the Mexican government lately. Authorities here are deeply concerned by what they characterize as the "massive and illegal entry" of Guatemalan citizens across the country's southern border.

It is perhaps ironic that Mexico, best known in the United States for sending hundreds of thousands of migrant laborers across the northern border into the U.S. every year, is itself the recipient of massive undocumented migration.

Mexico has been virtually inundated in recent months by thousands of refugees from Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Bolivia. Increased delinquency, violence, and the aggravation of the country's already serious unemployment problem are some of the most pressing concerns brought to the surface by this immigration, according to authorities. In fact, immigration sources we consulted report that as many as 1 million Latin American immigrants can be found in Mexico City—most of them from Central America.

A month ago, 500 Guatemalans entered the country by way of the southern state of Chiapas, reportedly fleeing from the Guatemalan security forces or right-wing paramilitary groups. Mexican leftists, working in coordination with their Guatemalan counterparts, immediately launched a "human rights" campaign to demand that the gov-

ernment here "open the borders" to the foreigners. The government, however, rapidly returned these individuals to their country, after establishing that they were not political refugees as they claimed.

But this was hardly the end of the story.

On June 25, over 2,000 people crossed the border at Chiapas—again claiming to be Guatemalan political refugees. A few days later Defense Secretary Félix Galván, Foreign Secretary Jorge Castañeda, Interior Secretary Enrique Olivares Santana, and Attorney General Oscar Flores Sánchez met to discuss the delicate situation.

Already Mexico's left had raised a hue and cry calling for the government to grant asylum. Yet security forces were greatly concerned lest terrorists—who might later target both the Mexican and Guatemalan governments for attack—be allowed to install themselves in the country. Also of weighty concern were the significant economic and other resources required to handle the thousands of homeless and impoverished foreigners.

After extensive discussion among the four high-ranking officials, they agreed to treat the refugees on a case-by-case basis, and not to grant political asylum to anyone who couldn't prove he was being persecuted for political reasons. Such individuals would be returned to their countries of origin.

Security officials privately told *EIR* that they expected the vast majority of the Guatemalans to be returned in this manner.

The Mexican army was to handle all logistical matters—including food and housing—for the thousands of Guatemalans, while the Interior and Foreign Ministries sift through each case.

The four Mexican officials also decided to invite the United Nations Human Rights Commission to come to Mexico and witness the case-by-case evaluation, in order to establish publicly the fairness of Mexico's conduct from the outset. This was deemed the best way to defuse the expected leftist outcry—both in Mexico and abroad—once it became known that Mexico was refusing to grant the Guatemalans blanket political amnesty.

The "human rights" lobby will, in all likelihood, use this to accuse the Mexican government of violating human rights, and of turning over Guatemalan citizens to a "certain death" in their country. In fact, *EIR* has already received information that a collection of leftist parties will hold a joint protest meeting shortly at the Jesuit clearinghouse in Mexico City, CENCOS.

One Mexican security official confided his concern. "I'm uneasy about inviting in the U.N. to oversee Mexico's internal policies. It sets a bad precedent of supranational involvement in sovereign national affairs. But frankly, we feel sort of boxed in. The trap being set is obvious enough to us, but there's no good solution to this whole mess until we can stabilize all of Central America by getting economic growth going there."

The source admitted: "I guess you could say we're buying time."