



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on December 5, 2011

Democrats Urge U.S. to Press Mexico on Central American Migrants' Safety

Led by Rep. Raul Grijalva, an Arizona Democrat and co-chairman of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, dozens of Democratic colleagues signed a letter that castigated Mexican authorities for kidnapping, robbing, and extorting money from migrants who cross the Mexican border into the United States.



“We believe that strengthening Mexico’s efforts to evaluate performance and increase the accountability of its security forces, including the Federal Police and the INM (National Migration Institute) should be key elements of U.S. assistance to Mexico,” [read](#) the letter. It added that such action is the only way to “ensure that crimes and human rights violations committed by members of these federal agencies do not go unpunished.”

“While the United States immigration debate focuses on the status of migrants already in this country, little has been said about what happens to migrants before they arrive,” [asserted](#) Rep. Grijalva. “Traveling from Mexico or Central America to the United States is one of the most dangerous journeys in the world, and letting the violence and abuse continue isn’t in anyone’s interest.”

The U.S. government has dispensed some \$700 million of a \$1.6-billion program called the Merida Initiative, which was launched in 2008 as a partnership between Mexico and the United States to combat organized crime, drug trafficking, corruption, and associated violence, while promoting respect for human rights and the rule of law on Mexico’s side of the border.

One program of the Merida Initiative includes a comprehensive justice sector reform plan to train police personnel, prosecutors, and partnerships relating to the judicial sector. Other activities involve implementing Mexico’s new justice system; improving social networks and community cohesion; spreading knowledge of, and the importance of, human rights; and improving cooperation between communities and the government.

While Grijalva and his colleagues touted the “important efforts” of the Initiative, the group lamented, “Regretfully, agents from these same agencies have also been implicated in multiple cases of abuse of migrants.” Citing a report released in February by Mexico’s independent National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), 11,333 migrants were kidnapped between April and September 2010, and additionally, migrants crossing the border illegally “are also frequently subjected to other abuses during their journey such as torture, extortion, and robbery; approximately six in 10 migrant women are raped.” The Democrats’ letter noted:



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We further ask you, Madame Secretary, to urge the Mexican government to take action to ensure the safety of migrants in transit in Mexico and the safety of those who seek to protect them from abuse. There should be clear mechanisms in place so that migrants who are abused are able to lodge complaints and receive the necessary protection, without fear of reprisals from federal agencies that might be signaled in the complaint. Migrant shelters that are under attack because of their important work to assist migrants and defend the human rights of this vulnerable group should also receive sustained support from the government for their efforts in the form of protection measures concurrent with their needs.

The current levels of abuse against migrants in transit in Mexico represent a humanitarian crisis that has been recognized by international human rights organizations across the globe. The United States, due to geographic proximity to Mexico and high levels of political and economic cooperation, has a clear interest and responsibility in engaging with Mexico to promote policies that will address the abuse of migrants as they travel in search of better opportunities for themselves and their families abroad and we hope you will address this issue as part of your bilateral agenda with Mexico.

The Mexican government has greatly abridged the penalties for its citizens living illegally in the United States. In the past, Mexican law called for prison sentences of up to 10 years for illegal immigration violations; however, in 2008, the penalty for such illicit behavior was reduced to only a fine. Immigrant-activist groups and liberal Democrats in Congress have requested that the Obama administration cease all deportations until an extensive immigration law can be passed to grant amnesty to illegal immigrants currently residing in the United States.

While President Obama claims he does not have the authority to execute a freeze on all deportations, earlier this year the administration advised immigration officials and federal prosecutors not to become involved in cases involving rank-and-file immigrants who do not have either repeated immigration law violations or extensive criminal records.

Hispanic congressional members, including those who signed Friday's letter, are planning to meet with Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano this week to discuss the new priorities. "The daily abuses suffered by migrants en route to the United States directly impact American lives, and American policymakers need to make stopping them a priority," [charged](#) Rep. Grijalva. He added, "The State Department has a responsibility to look beyond our own borders and halt these ongoing tragedies."

Critics question not only the amount of foreign aid the United States is now dispensing to the Mexican government — which, many argue, is being wasted on bureaucratic motives — but also the U.S. government's actions to encourage more Mexican migrants to cross the border illegally. Analysts point out that the request by the group of Democrats should not be surprising, considering their unrelenting support for amnesty, welfare and entitlements, and subsidized education for illegal aliens.

Indeed, Rep. Grijalva [voted](#) yes on the American DREAM Act; no on the Minuteman Project; and no on reporting illegal aliens who receive hospital treatment. Additionally, he was christened with a zero-percent rating by [USBC](#), a non-profit citizens' lobby dedicated to securing U.S. borders and stopping welfare fraud by illegal immigrants.



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