

The Flight and Plight of Transgender People Seeking Asylum in the US

by Blue

Last summer 16 people formed the 1st Trans-Gay Migrant Caravan fleeing from Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Mexico to the US border to ask for political asylum. Four gay men and 12 transgender women arrived in Nogales, AZ on August 10, 2017. Kimberly, a transgender woman from Honduras made this statement at the border rally, “We have fled from our countries of origin because most people do not accept us as trans girls. The mistreatment against us begins in our families, when they run us from our homes. They take us out of our homes because we are trans girls. Many of us have been abused by gang members, even by the security forces. Even the police themselves have been mistreated us, raped us, beaten us.

IT'S COMING...



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“In our journey for dignity we have suffered tremendously. We do not want to relive this violence by being referred to detention centers for men where we are at high risk of being sexually assaulted.”

Some members of the Trans-Gay Migrant Caravan had sought political asylum in Mexico believing that the Mexican government would offer them shelter and improved living conditions as LGBT people. “We were wrong. Most of us were denied the right to refugee

status. Even though a few of us were granted asylum, we found ourselves reliving the experiences of violence and discrimination that we had suffered in Central America. The Mexican authorities have physically and sexually abused us on several occasions. Employees of the National Institute of Migration of Mexico, for example, tortured many of us to have sex with them. “

ICE detention centers are not ever safe places for transgender and gay people. According to the Freedom of Information Act on the Department of Homeland Security and from complaints of LGBT human rights advocates, it is documented that LGBTQI people in detention centers are 1.5 times more likely to be sexually violated. In retaliation, several facilities deal with sexual assaults on transgender and queer people by placing them in solitary confinement instead of protecting them from the assaults. Several gay men have been put in isolation by prison officials solely for being effeminate.

Organizations supporting the Caravan had worked really hard with local communities to arrange homes where the young immigrants could stay when they crossed the border. Instead they were immediately taken into custody by ICE, put into detention and held for several months. Information is sketchy but as of October, 2017 nine had been released, five were still being held and three had been deported to Honduras and El Salvador.

By May of this year the situation for transgender migrants and most other people had worsened. The lines of those seeking asylum at the border continue to grow longer and longer. People are waiting weeks before they are even seen. There are little to no facilities to house them while they wait. The shelter CARITAS in Tijuana, that at one time during the caravan received 35+ LGBTQI members of the community, was set on fire according to Diversidad Sin Fronteras.

On May 29th Diversidad Sin Fronteras reported the sad news that Roxana Hernandez was murdered while in US detention. This is her story. On March 25th, 2018, along

with more than 1,300 other people, Roxana Hernández began her journey across Mexico as part of the 2018 Refugee Caravan with Pueblo Sin Fronteras. She also found support along the way from Diversidad Sin Fronteras. Roxana – or Roxy as her friends knew her – traveled over 2,000 miles through Mexican territory on foot, by train, by bus because her last aspiration and hope was to save her life. She fled the violence, hate, stigma and vulnerability that she suffered as a trans woman in her country, Honduras, and also in Mexico.



She saw in the United States the opportunity to start new life free of abuse, risk, and threats, by seeking asylum. What she found in the United States, however, was death. Roxy exercised her legal right to seek asylum at the San Ysidro Port of Entry on the morning of May 9th. She was processed and held for 5 days in the dreaded “icebox” - holding cells with extremely low temperatures – under the egis of us Customs & Border Protection. She suffered cold and lack of adequate food or medical care, with the lights on 24 hours a day. During her first week in the United States Roxy’s body and spirit quickly deteriorated.

us immigration authorities finally recognized (despite her having been in government custody for over a week) that she needed medical attention once she was transferred to the immigrant prison in Cibola, New Mexico. According to a May 25th ICE press release, which explained the causes of her death in the most convenient way possible for the agency, Roxy was transported on May 17th to Lovelace Medical Center. She did not come out alive.

Roxy died due to medical negligence by us immigration authorities. In other words, she was murdered. Roxy died in the country she had sought to start a new life in, she died for being a transgender woman, a migrant who was treated neither with respect nor with dignity.

On June 6th Diversidad Sin Fronteras held a demonstration in Mexico City to honor Roxy’s life and demand justice for her.

In the usa, immigrant rights groups call for:

- Dignified and humane treatment to all asylum-seekers and above all to those in an extreme state of vulnerability, like Roxana was.
- An immigration system that respects people’s human rights, instead of criminalizing and killing them.
- The closure of all immigration detention centers, which are prisons where us authorities and private guards unjustly punish immigrants, violate their rights and act arbitrarily with no transparency or accountability.
- An end to US intervention in the immigration policies of other countries, which violate their sovereignty.
- The abolition of Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE)

In Mexico, groups call for:

- Freedom of transit for all migrants and additional protection for asylum seekers who cannot live safely in Mexico
- Safety in the shelters that provide homes for members of the LGBTTQI community
- Recognizing cases of gender-based violence for asylum in Mexico when appropriate

For more information see #Justicefor Roxsana, #DismantleICE, #endtransdetention, #NiUnaMenos, #NotOneLess and on FaceBook @Diversidad Sin Fronteras, @Al Otro Lado, and @Pueblo Sin Fronteras

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