

## **Joanna from Kino Border Initiative writes:**

I'm writing to share two updates from US shelters that receive asylum seekers. First, at the end of this information, is a statement put out yesterday by the network of shelters. (Casa Alitas in Tucson is the point of contact). Please help share and uplift this message. Second, please consider sharing on social media as well as hanging a shoelace as part of holiday decorations or giving gifts tied with a shoelace instead of a ribbon. Here is the suggested text to put on social media or on an explainer tag for your holiday decorations:

Two options for titles depending on the context: Returning families to Mexico delivers them to traffickers or Display a shoelace, connect with asylum seekers. US officials take shoelaces from asylum seekers so that they don't harm themselves in detention. But then they send families with children back to dangerous and unfamiliar Mexican border towns. There, human traffickers and cartels target these families for extortion and trafficking because no shoelaces means no local connections. The "Remain in Mexico" policy delivers families into the hands of cartels and traffickers #unintendedties

Here is the statement:

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **US Shelters for Asylum Seekers Declare: There is Room at the Inn**

LAREDO, TEXAS – Today, representatives of 31 US border shelters who have collectively provided temporary shelter to welcome over 320,000 asylum seekers in 2019 demand an end to the misleadingly named "Migrant Protection Protocol (MPP)." In a two-day meeting this weekend in Laredo, Texas, the shelters shared testimonies of the difficult decisions families make to leave their homes and seek safety for themselves and their children at the border. We also discussed the extraordinary work of people of goodwill along the border who have volunteered their time and donated resources for asylum-seeking families because they are motivated by an understanding of our common humanity. Within our border communities, we reject the message that our capacity to help is overwhelmed.

Collectively, we are here to let the US government know that there is room in our inns.

Instead of allowing us to welcome these families, through MPP the US government is returning them to Mexico, where they face homelessness and danger from human traffickers and cartels. As border shelters, we are ready to provide places of safety and welcome to asylum seekers. We know that when the US government returns families to Mexico to await court dates, the very process of return identifies them as targets for organized crime and heightens their risk of trafficking. US officials remove asylum seekers' shoelaces purportedly so that they don't harm themselves while in detention. But when they are sent back to Mexico, the cartels identify

families with missing shoelaces as easy prey for kidnapping and trafficking. These unintended ties between US border policy and cartel violence harm families and strengthen organized crime. According to Human Rights First, there are 636 publicly reported cases of violent attacks against asylum seekers returned under MPP, and the vast majority of such attacks are not reported. We know from our firsthand experience that we can avoid feeding such violence by allowing families to seek asylum from within the US, instead of returning them to Mexico. We, the representatives of 31 shelters are ready and eager to welcome asylum-seeking families. We oppose US government practice and policy that instead subject them to suffering and call on the US Administration and Congress to immediately end MPP.

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