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Mexico: Migrants making dangerous journey through Mexico 'desperately need socks'

A thought-provoking new campaign by Amnesty International highlights the plight of thousands of Central American migrants travelling across the region every year by calling for donations of a particular, humble item of clothing.

When Amnesty International asked migrants what one thing they would take if leaving the country, the answer was: 'socks'.

"Most migrants told us that they had no possessions with them at all because they expected to be attacked and robbed on the journey and that anything of value would increase their chances of kidnap," said Rupert Knox, Mexico Researcher at Amnesty International.

"Much to our surprise, the migrants did tell us that one thing they desperately needed on their journey were socks. On journeys that can be up to hundreds of miles, untreated blisters risk lives and a fresh pair of socks can make all the difference."

In a three-minute campaign video filmed in Mexico, members of the public are asked: "If you had to leave your country and could only take one thing, what would it be?" Residents of Mexico City gave answers ranging from 'identity cards' to 'tabasco sauce'.

Their responses starkly contrasted with those given by migrants, whose request for socks has led to the launch of a website - sendsocks.org - where the public can watch the campaign video and make donations.

Driven by grinding poverty and insecurity, Central American migrants travel north to Mexico in the hope of eventually reaching the USA. Many face kidnap, rape and murder at the hands of criminal gangs, often in collusion with authorities, during their passage through Mexico.

Those responsible for the abuses are rarely held to account and many cases of abducted or murdered migrants are not adequately investigated.

"Migrants are determined to risk all in the hope of a better future, but the reality is that for many the journey through Mexico - one of the most dangerous journeys in the world - will be devastating," said Rupert Knox.

The Mexican government has failed to live up to promises to protect migrants from widespread human rights abuses.

"Despite the Mexican government's promise of change, laws and other official measures are having little or no impact and systematic abuses of migrants continue unabated," said Rupert Knox.

“For the past two years we’ve been calling on Mexico’s federal authorities to develop and implement an action plan to protect migrants. We hope this new campaign will put pressure on the government to turning promises into action.”

Amnesty International stands in solidarity with the many brave migrants who travel across Mexico and asks the public to donate socks via sendsocks.org.

Background

There are no official figures for the numbers of migrants travelling illegally through Mexico but 60,000 were detained and repatriated in 2011. Every year tens of thousands of women, men and children travel through Mexico without legal permission as irregular migrants. More than nine in every 10 are Central Americans, mostly from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras or Nicaragua. The vast majority are headed for the US border hoping for of new life.

Mexico is one of the few countries in the world that is both a destination and transit route for migrants, as well as a starting point for emigration as thousands of Mexicans try to cross the border with the USA in search of work.

In February 2011, the National Human Rights Commission reported that 11,000 migrants had been kidnapped in the previous six months.

Throughout 2011, migrant rights defenders have been subject to attack, death threats and intimidation in reprisal for their efforts to support migrants.

Fray Tomas, who runs “La 72” migrants’ shelter in Tenosique, Tabasco state, has received anonymous death threats over the phone and been insulted by state police and members of the military.

During Mexico’s appearance before the UN Committee on the Protection of all Migrant Workers in April 2011, it was clear that the government lacked a concrete plan of action to tackle the migrants’ rights crisis in the country.