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Mexico migrant find highlights grim conditions

The discovery of more than 500 irregular migrants being smuggled through Mexico in squalid conditions highlights the lack of adequate protection for the thousands that travel through the country each year, Amnesty International said today.

Police in Chiapas in southern Mexico on Tuesday intercepted two trailer trucks carrying 513 migrants, including 32 women and four children, from Central America, the Caribbean and Asia who were crowded into the trailers.

The state prosecutor's office announced that six people had been arrested on suspicion of people-smuggling in relation to the operation, including the drivers.

"While it's a positive development that Mexican authorities have intercepted these trucks and an investigation is under way, the appalling conditions the migrants endured highlights the vulnerability of tens of thousands of irregular migrants who pass through Mexico each year," said Susan Lee, Amnesty International's Americas Programme Director.

"Mexican authorities must do more to protect the many people braving one of the most dangerous journeys in the world in hopes of finding a better life."

According to official sources, the migrants expected to travel to the US, where they had each agreed to pay US \$7,000 to their alleged smugglers. The migrants lacked air and water during their journey due to severe crowding inside the trailers – 240 people travelled in one trailer and 273 in the other.

Tens of thousands of irregular migrants passing through Mexico each year face a variety of serious abuses from organized criminal gangs, including kidnappings, threats and assaults.

Amnesty International has reported that many also face abuses at the hands of Mexican authorities, including excessive use of force and arbitrary detention. Because of the migrants' lack of legal status, it is extremely difficult for migrants to have their complaints processed effectively and those responsible are rarely held to account.

The organization has urged Mexican federal authorities to set up a taskforce to co-ordinate actions to protect irregular migrants in Mexico and hold to account those responsible for abuses.

"Irregular migrants must be allowed to report abuses without fear of deportation or repatriation, and Mexican authorities should collect and publish accurate official data on abuses against migrants, including violent deaths and reports of missing persons," said Susan Lee.

"Only through a serious, coordinated effort can the Mexican authorities protect migrants from the host of threats they face."