

AI INDEX: AMR 51/33/98

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## **From San Diego to Brownsville: Human rights violations on the USA-Mexico border**

**San Diego** -- Populations either side of the California to Texas line have much in common -- including family ties -- but the manner in which the United States is enforcing immigration laws is aggravating the turbulence and friction that have characterized the region throughout this century, says a new Amnesty International report.

The report -- which focuses on incidents of ill-treatment and brutality by officers of the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) -- examines the recent history of the US-Mexico border region, the INS' human rights record during the 1990's, and some of the steps it has taken to acknowledge the seriousness of the problems.

The INS has had a long and troubled history in the US-Mexico border region, with many allegations of officer misconduct including unlawful lethal shootings, physical assaults and ill-treatment of detainees in custody. Amnesty International's report indicates that steps taken in recent years to seal the border, coupled with the US army's role in assisting the INS in the so-called "War on Drugs", have increased the chances of human rights violations against people suspected of being illegal immigrants.

Allegations highlighted in the report include people being struck with batons, fists and feet -- often as a punishment for attempting to run away from Border Patrol agents -- denial of food, water, blankets and medical attention for long hours, sexual abuse, and abusive or racist conduct sometimes resulting in the wrongful deportation of US citizens to Mexico.

Those reporting ill-treatment include men, women and children, almost exclusively of Latin American descent. They also include citizens and legal permanent residents of the USA and members of four Native American nations whose tribal lands span the US-Mexico border.

People of Latin American descent have been ill-treated, detained, interrogated, searched and harassed because of their ethnic origin. Unaccompanied juveniles in INS detention often find it difficult to obtain adequate legal advice and representation, despite being recognized internationally as an especially vulnerable group, and detained children have no right to a lawyer.

Pressed by economic and social problems, many thousands of Mexicans in particular, but also people from other Latin American countries, go in search of better livelihood north of the border every year. While Amnesty International does not take issue with the right of the United States to police its international borders, the organization insists this should be done in compliance with the country's international human rights obligations.

Cases in which such obligations have been violated span the spectrum of circumstances in which the Border Patrol and INS officers have come into contact with the public:

- Jorge Soriano Bautista: chased by a Border Patrol vehicle which allegedly hit him in the back resulting in his arm being broken. Despite his broken arm, the agents pushed him back under the fence into Mexico.  
*“...medical care and treatment shall be provided whenever necessary.” Principle 24, UN Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention*
- David, a juvenile from El Salvador: arrested in New Mexico and -- in violation of INS policy, US law and international standards -- handed over to the Mexican authorities, who held him for three days, allegedly without food and water, and hit him.  
*“Every child deprived of his or her liberty shall have the right to prompt access to legal and other appropriate assistance....” Article 37(d) UN Convention on the Rights of the child.*
- Daniel Rodríguez Biúrquiz: apprehended by the Border Patrol which, when he tried to run away, beat him with their batons. He was deported immediately, allegedly without being processed, photographed or fingerprinted, and he believes this was done because of his highly visible broken nose, and heavy bruising to his face, body and legs.  
*“No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”Article 7, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)*
- Luz López and Norma Contreras, both aged 23, from Guatemala: a Border Patrol agent handcuffed and detained them in his vehicle. He allegedly sexually assaulted both women for several hours -- on one occasion in full view of a second agent -- and afterwards gave the women one dollar each and released them into the USA. *Article 7, ICCPR.*

The Border Patrol has been a powerful presence in the border region for generations. It is a place where some parents of Latin American origin, fearing an accidental deportation do not let their children leave home in the morning without their birth certificates.

Amnesty International stresses that the steady growth of the Border Patrol -- numbering more than 6,300 agents in 1997 and aiming to increase its staff by 1,000 officers per year until 2,001 -- should be accompanied by instruction on international human rights standards if further human rights violations are to be avoided.  
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For further information, to request a copy of the report *USA: Human Rights Concerns in the Border Region with Mexico*, or to arrange an interview, please phone Soraya Bermejo, at Amnesty International’s Press Office, on +44 171 413 5562.

*Amnesty International now has an ISDN line for studio-quality radio interviews from their offices in London. Please phone for further information.*