

Arizona Border Welcoming Task Force Responds to Biden's Reimplementation and Continuation of Trump-Era Asylum Policies

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The Arizona Border Welcoming Task Force (AZWTF) strongly condemns the Biden administration's choice to [reimplement](#) the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), also known as the "Remain in Mexico" program, which will once again gravely endanger the safety and basic human rights of people seeking asylum in the United States. We also lament the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals' recent [decision](#) which, in addition to upholding the order to resume MPP, rests on highly problematic and erroneous assumptions about asylum processing obligations under U.S. law.

First enacted by the Trump administration in 2019, MPP mandates that certain asylum seekers at the U.S. southern border be expelled into Mexico following each step of their legal proceedings, forcing individuals and families to fight complex asylum cases while struggling to survive in dangerous Mexican border regions.

We as the AZWTF align with advocacy organizations across the country that have rebuked MPP for the massive rights violations built into it, such as the near impossibility of finding [legal counsel](#) for asylum cases, and the staggering number of [violent attacks](#) against migrants enrolled in the program.

MPP plainly [violates U.S. treaty obligations](#) to not expel asylum seekers to countries where their lives or freedom are threatened. Instead of taking steps to revoke the policy, the Biden administration continues to make claims that it has no choice, but it has in fact chosen to *expand* MPP to apply to a broader group of people than the Trump administration ever did, including Haitians who are disproportionately at risk of racialized violence in Mexico.

The combination of MPP and Title 42 – another Trump-era policy utilized by the Biden administration which uses public health as a pretext to expel asylum seekers without due process – **has effectively ended access to asylum. Instead, at a time when ports have been reopened to non-essential travel, the most vulnerable asylum seekers are forced to trek through long stretches of perilous desert and across rivers between U.S. ports of entry for even a chance at presenting their legal asylum claim.** These policies therefore [costs lives](#), incentivize irregular entry, and are a far cry from the “fair, orderly, and humane immigration system” that the Biden administration [promised](#).

Indeed, the recent reimplementing and expansion of MPP has already led to serious humanitarian concerns in Yuma, as vulnerable asylum seekers increasingly aim to pursue their claims prior to MPP’s expansion into Arizona. Denied access to ports of entry, these asylum seekers are forced into perilous journeys across desert terrain to turn themselves in to Border Patrol. Unfortunately, due to the increase in numbers, Border Patrol in Yuma has not been able to effectively and timely process asylum seekers – leaving them in incredibly precarious circumstances. Inhumane policies like Title 42 and MPP, ensure this outcome by design. Restricting access to orderly processing at ports creates artificial crises that have deadly consequences for asylum seekers.

For almost a year now, we and allies along the border have called on the Biden administration to pursue the only morally defensible course of action: **allow asylum seekers true access to the U.S. asylum system as required by law.** Every day the administration fails to do so through its continuation of policies like MPP and Title 42, Biden abdicates his so-called “[sacred commitment](#)” to refugees on U.S. doorsteps, and clings ever more tightly to the legacy of his predecessor.

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“We are disheartened to learn that the Biden Administration has chosen to not only reimplement the Migration Protection Protocols, but also to expand this inhumane policy to include all asylum seekers from the western hemisphere,” **said Alexandra Miller, Asylum Seekers & Families Program Director for the International Rescue Committee of Arizona.** “For those of us who stood alongside asylum seekers suffering indefinitely under the original policy, we know that MPP is incurably flawed and exceedingly dangerous. We know that as long as the Biden administration chooses to return asylum seekers to Mexico, they are choosing to send vulnerable people and families into harm’s way – some potentially to their deaths. We plead with the Biden administration to stand with the most vulnerable, to re-prioritize a more humane approach and to reinforce access to asylum at our borders, instead of doubling down on the prior administration's most brutal policies.”

"We want to express our deep sadness and disappointment in the Biden Administration for not only reimplementing Trump’s Migrant Protection Protocol, but for also expanding it to include the entire Western Hemisphere, **said Laurie Benson, Executive Director and Founder of Madres e Hijos.** “We urge this Administration to stand on the side of humanity. History will not look kindly on the treatment being received at our US borders by those in need.”

"The Florence Project is deeply disappointed and perturbed to learn that the Biden administration has officially restarted MPP and extended the Title 42 border closure, effectively ending all access to asylum

within the United States. As we (and countless other organizations) have stated time and again, there is no way to make MPP safe, humane, or just, and Title 42 is simply cruelty disguised as caution. Despite campaign promises to restore a safe and orderly asylum process, the Biden administration has done the opposite by continuing, and in fact expanding, Trump-era racist, anti-immigrant policies like MPP and Title 42. ‘By embracing these policies, the Biden administration is abandoning one of America’s fundamental values: offering safe refuge in the United States for those who need it,’ **said Chelsea Sachau, Managing Attorney of the Florence Project’s Border Action Team.** ‘In doing so, the administration is normalizing these horrific policies and, by making it increasingly difficult for the U.S. to extricate itself from these inhumane policies and build back a safe, orderly, and just asylum process, is laying the groundwork for a future where asylum protection is a mere illusion.’”

“We condemn the administration’s decision to reinstate MPP,” **said Alba Jaramillo, Executive Director for Arizona Justice For Our Neighbors.** “The changes to MPP policy fall short of providing asylum seekers with due process rights and continue to endanger their lives. Permitting migrants with only 24 – hours to find and consult with an attorney virtually or by phone for a non-refoulement interview does not honor the meaning of access to counsel. Forcing migrants in MPP to remain in Mexico raises human rights concerns. Overall, this policy is a mockery of our legal obligations to asylum seekers under national and international law. This administration continues to fail our most vulnerable of immigrants at the border, seeking safety in the United States.”

“Families who are seeking asylum make the difficult choice to leave behind their homelands because they see no alternative to protect their children's lives, **said Joanna Williams, Executive Director of the Kino Border Initiative.** “As a Catholic and Christian organization, in their experiences we see the reflection of the Holy Family, which also fled to save Jesus’ life. MPP and Title 42 intentionally inflict further suffering and trauma on these families and strand them in precarity and insecurity in northern Mexican cities. As we accompany these families, our hearts break because it does not have to be this way. We can and must instead treat our brothers and sisters with love, empathy, solidarity, and hospitality.”

“The decision to restart MPP will have devastating impacts on the lives of thousands of asylum-seekers, subjecting them to dangerous and life-threatening conditions,” **said Victoria Lopez, Advocacy and Legal Director at the ACLU of Arizona.** “MPP is part of the long-standing and failed strategy by the U.S. government of deterring people from obtaining lawful and meaningful opportunities to seek asylum. It is long past time for the Biden administration to end illegal and cruel policies like MPP and Title 42.”

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The Arizona Welcoming Task Force is a coalition of humanitarian and legal service providers in the Arizona-Sonora border region, all of whom serve migrants seeking safety in the United States. AZWTF has met regularly with representatives from DHS and the White House since early 2021, fiercely advocating that the rights of asylum seekers be respected in U.S. border policies and practices.