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News Releases



OCTOBER 2, 2012 EL PASO, TX

United States and Mexico begin Interior Repatriation Initiative

EL PASO, Texas — U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Mexican Ministry of the Interior today announced the beginning of the Interior Repatriation Initiative (IRI), a new pilot to provide humane, safe and orderly repatriation of Mexican nationals to the interior of Mexico and ultimately to their hometowns, instead of returning them to towns on the U.S.-Mexico border.

ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) will provide air transportation via charter aircraft to Mexican nationals who emigrated from the interior of Mexico. Upon arrival in Mexico City, the Government of Mexico will provide them transportation to their places of origin. This initiative will allow the Government of Mexico to assist returning Mexican nationals in safely reintegrating into their communities.

"IRI reflects our commitment and ongoing bilateral effort with the government of Mexico to ensure strong, humane and effective enforcement of both nations' immigration laws," said ICE Director John Morton. "This initiative will better ensure that individuals repatriated to Mexico are removed in circumstances that are safe and controlled."

Gustavo Mohar Betancourt, Undersecretary of Mexico's population, migration and religious affairs said, "This initiative aims to collaborate and fully support border state authorities by reducing the number of Mexican nationals who are repatriated to the border region. The newly repatriated, often with no means to return home, are susceptible to becoming a part of criminal organizations as a means of survival."

The IRI will include Mexican nationals pending removal from all areas of the United States. Historically, a significant number of individuals are not from the northern border towns to which they are repatriated, leaving them in communities where they have no ties or family support. Removing Mexican nationals to the interior of Mexico is part of an effort to reduce repeat attempts to illegally enter the United States, avoid the loss of human life, and minimize the potential for exploitation of illegal migrants by human smuggling and trafficking organizations as well as other criminal organizations.

Individuals who participate in the pilot initiative are transferred from across the United States to the Otero County Processing Center in Chaparral, N.M., before departure on an IRI flight.

The first repatriation flight of 131 Mexican nationals departed El Paso International Airport Tuesday, Oct. 2 and flights are scheduled to continue this year through to Nov. 29. Mexican nationals participating in IRI are removed on charter flights via the ICE ERO Air Operations (IAO) Unit. Headquartered in Kansas City, Mo., IAO has supported ERO since 2006 by providing air transportation and removal coordination services to ERO field offices nationwide. Staffed by ERO officers, these air charters enable the agency to repatriate large groups of deportees in an efficient, expeditious and humane manner.

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U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.

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