

News Releases

July 21, 2008

United States and Mexico resume voluntary interior repatriation program for the fifth consecutive year

WASHINGTON - U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announced that the governments of Mexico and the United States are resuming the Interior Repatriation Program (MIRP) this summer to ensure the safe, effective and humanitarian return of Mexican nationals illegally in the United States to their places of origin in the interior of Mexico. The first repatriation flight in this seasonal program departed yesterday from Tucson, AZ International Airport in Arizona with approximately 115 Mexican nationals who volunteered to be repatriated.

The program is scheduled to continue until Sept. 28, 2008. July, August and September typically present the most severe climate conditions for individuals crossing the Arizona-Sonora desert. ICE and the Government of Mexico recognized that the standard practice of removing illegal aliens across the border left many prey to smugglers and traffickers who work the border areas persuading newly removed Mexicans to make the trip again, despite the severe heat, with the promise of helping them elude authorities.

"This ongoing program provides a safe, humane return of aliens to the interior of Mexico in an effort to save lives and discourage additional illegal border crossings during these hot, sometimes unbearable summers through hostile, desert terrain," said ICE Detention and Removal Operations Acting Director, James T. Hayes, Jr.

In 2003, the U.S. and the Government of Mexico, by joint accord, designated the Tucson Sector's western corridor as a "high risk" area under the bi-national Border Safety Initiative. As a result, both governments designed and continue to administer this voluntary repatriation program with the goal of reducing the loss of life in the desert areas during the summer heat, deterring illegal immigration and combating organized crime linked to human smuggling, trafficking and the violence they propagate on both sides of the U.S-Mexican border.

A 2004 Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Government of Mexico established the framework for the nations to work cooperatively in safely repatriating Mexican nationals who volunteer to leave the U.S.

Only non-criminal Mexican nationals are eligible for the program, which includes Mexican nationals with final orders of removal from other ICE offices around the country, Mexican

nationals processed by U.S. Border Patrol for expedited removal and Mexican nationals deemed "at risk"; whose age, physical condition or travel status render them more likely to fall victims to the heat or border criminals.

In the past three summers, U.S. and Mexican officials have jointly administered this program to safely return approximately 49,793 Mexican nationals from the Arizona-Sonora desert to their hometowns in the interior of Mexico. In 2007 alone, ICE repatriated 13,865 Mexican nationals between July and September. The program has served as a model for bi-national cooperation at all levels and both nations have gained valuable experience during the three summers, making adjustments along the way.

ICE Detention and Removal Operation's Removal Coordination Unit is responsible for providing oversight and coordination of the two daily flights with a capacity to carry 120 passengers each from Tucson International Airport. Under the initiative, Mexican nationals apprehended in Arizona are processed at centers in Nogales and Yuma, Arizona, where they are interviewed by Mexican and U.S. officials for possible inclusion in the Interior Repatriation Program. Those who volunteer to participate in the program are then flown to Mexico City and provided bus transportation to their places of origin in the interior of Mexico.

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U.S. Immigration and Customs
Enforcement (ICE) was established in
March 2003 as the largest investigative arm
of the Department of Homeland Security.
ICE is comprised of five integrated
divisions that form a 21st century law
enforcement agency with broad
responsibilities for a number of key
homeland security priorities.

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