The Border of Moral Duty: The Mexican Perspective on the Dehumanization of Migration

by María de los Ángeles Huerta del Río

The following is an edited transcript of the remarks by María de los Ángeles Huerta del Río, a former congresswoman from Mexico, to the July 31, 2026 EIR Emergency Roundtable, titled "Solve the Immigration Crisis with Development—What You Need To Know About the Strategic Significance of Pope Leo's Encyclical." The video is available here.

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We are gathered here today by an uncomfortable yet urgent question: Does humanity have the moral fitness to survive? If we assess the answer by examining the institutional architecture of global borders, the conclusion is alarming. We are not facing a crisis of population flows; we are facing a crisis of human decency.

For Mexico, migration is not a theoretical debate about national security; it is an open wound and a human reality that we share with millions of our compatriots. Today, the Mexican migrant community in the United States—more than 40 million Mexicans and their descendants—faces an institutional onslaught without historical precedent. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), along with allied U.S. agencies, has shifted from immigration management to the systematic criminalization of vulnerability.

When a legal system justifies placing the sovereignty of a line on a map above the intrinsic right to life, that system suffers from moral blindness. Therefore, I present the following thesis to this seminar: Humanity does possess the moral fitness to survive, but our state institutions are stifling that capacity by prioritizing the legal order over human dignity.

Let us look at reality without euphemisms. The view from Mexico of what is happening today on our northern border is deeply troubling. We are witnessing a deliberate strategy of multidimensional harassment that strips migrants of their most basic rights.

First, let us discuss lethal violence in custody. These are not isolated statistics; they are lives shattered by institutional negligence. Recent cases, such as the deaths of Mexicans in ICE custody due to a lack of timely medical care, or the disproportionate use of lethal force by the border patrol [U.S. Customs and Border Protection], demonstrate that in U.S. detention centers, the right to health and life is suspended based on immigration status.

Second, we denounce the perversion of justice. It has become a systematic practice to file criminal charges of "assault on an officer" against migrants to cover up physical abuse by border agents. A migrant is beaten and, immediately afterward, accused of assaulting their captor. Although half of these cases fall apart in court, due to lack of evidence, the psychological, financial, and reputational damage has already been done and may be irreversible.

Finally, persecution has ceased to be purely geographical and has become civil and financial. Recent regulations aimed at blocking access to the banking and credit systems for undocumented individuals, seek to stifle the daily lives of families. They are no longer merely expelled from the country; attempts are being made to erase them from the social fabric, condemning them to absolute clandestinity.

Herein lies the Gordian knot of the moral dilemma of our time: the hypocrisy of the global economic

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system. The very same society that persecutes migrants in political discourse depends on them for its material subsistence.

Our migrant community sustains entire industries in the United States. They are the hands that harvest food, build cities, and sustain the service and hospitality sectors. The U.S. business sector knows this and demands labor. However, the morality of contemporary capitalism operates under a perverse logic: it accepts the labor force but rejects the rights of the people who provide it. Labor is coveted, but workers are criminalized.

This is where we answer the seminar's question. Moral failure does not lie with civil society. Humanity's moral fitness is evident every day in networks of solidarity, in civil society shelters in Mexico, and in sanctuary churches in the United States, where ordinary citizens risk their own freedom to provide a meal or a roof over the head of the persecuted. Moral fitness exists among the people; moral bankruptcy lies with the State.

Given the gravity of the situation, Mexico's stance has had to evolve drastically. The era of lukewarm diplomatic notes of protest is behind us. Mexico understands that the diplomacy of complaint is insufficient in the face of institutionalized cruelty.

Today, the Mexican State is implementing a strategy of transnational legal justice. Direct criminal and civil lawsuits have been filed and coordinated in U.S. courts against private corporations that profit from ICE detention centers and against the agents responsible for abuses. Consular defense is no longer an administrative formality; it is a strategic litigation front. If the U.S. state apparatus uses the law as a weapon of oppression, Mexico will use the courts of that same country as a shield of defense and a hammer of accountability.

Likewise, Mexico maintains in international forums that the solution will never be the "externalization of borders." A humanitarian crisis cannot be resolved by turning transit countries into forced waiting rooms under economic pressure. The solution may lie in some form of global governance with a development-oriented approach, aligned with the new strategies of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which view human mobility not as a threat to sovereignty, but as a driver of co-developed and sustainable development.

Distinguished colleagues: The migration crisis is the mirror in which humanity looks at itself and discovers its true face. If we allow hatred, institutional racism, and the dehumanization of "the other" to become normalized at the busiest border on the planet, we will be signing our own letter of moral capitulation.

Survival as a species requires not only technological advances or macroeconomic balance; it requires, fundamentally, the preservation of empathy. A system that cages children, denies water in the desert, and criminalizes honest work is a system that is morally moribund.

Mexico raises its voice at this international seminar not only on behalf of its citizens, but also in defense of the universal principle of human dignity. We have the moral fitness to survive, but we must rescue it from the clutches of xenophobic bureaucracy. Let us begin today, from within academia and politics, by calling things by their proper names: migration is a right to life; ICE's persecution is an affront to humanity.

Thank you very much.