



Lemkin Institute Statement on the inhumane and illegal transportation of asylum seekers and migrants from Florida, Texas, and Arizona to other U.S. States

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June 2022, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed and approved a budget to set aside \$12 million specifically designated to create a program for transporting so-called “unauthorized” migrants out of Florida. In September 2022, this budget was used to round up 48 Venezuelan asylum-seekers in San Antonio, Texas, place them on a private plane, and transport them to Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts where they were then left with no resources, no accommodations, and limited understanding of the map of the island.

Shortly after the news broke in the US on the abandoned asylum seekers, Governor DeSantis’ office claimed credit for the political stunt, which was aimed at northeastern Democrats who have been outspoken against immigration policies that are designed to crack down on immigration into the United States. Interviews with targeted asylum seekers revealed that two individuals, including a Venezuelan migrant, were sent to recruit asylum seekers to agree to travel to Massachusetts. However, the information used by recruiters was intentionally misleading, with promises of accommodations and employment. Asylum seekers recount that paperwork signed was not always translated into Spanish, their destination location was not fully disclosed, they were promised jobs and temporary accommodations, and were offered compensation for signing the consent forms. On the day of transport, asylum seekers were not provided with adequate food or water. Immigration and civil rights attorneys representing the asylum seekers in Martha’s Vineyard shared that DeSantis’ office did not inform Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) of the relocation to allow for addresses to be updated, setting asylum seekers up for missing immigration appointments that are needed to obtain asylum in the United States.

The removal of asylum seekers from San Antonio to Martha’s Vineyard is not the first instance of a state using state funding to remove and relocate migrants from their states. In April 2022, Texas Governor Greg Abbott initiated Texas’ “drop-off” policy, when he transported a bus of asylum seekers in Texas to Washington D.C. to protest President Biden’s immigration policy. Texas’ “drop-off” policy has totaled \$12.7 million. Governor Abbott’s office claims that, similar to Florida’s policy, they obtain written permission before transporting asylum seekers; however,

there is no evidence that those transported were provided with enough information to make an informed decision. Texas has also transported asylum seekers to New York City and Chicago.

Arizona Governor Doug Ducey has implemented a similar policy to Governor Abbott and Governor DeSantis and has been busing asylum seekers out of Arizona for several months. Once again, he claims that those who are transported out of state are doing so willingly; yet there is, once again, no evidence that the information provided, if any, has been accurate enough to allow for informed consent to be given. Following an independent investigation, Arizona's Family, a Phoenix area news station, has revealed that the transportation of asylum seekers from Arizona has cost the state \$4 million.

Shortly after asylum seekers arrived in Martha's Vineyard, witnesses in San Antonio reported the recruiters were already contacting migrants in San Antonio for another flight from Florida that was destined for Delaware, President Biden's home state. Once this plan was revealed, the flight was canceled and the plan was either abandoned or postponed. Governor DeSantis' office has not commented on whether or not this was part of Florida's new state immigration policy. To date, thousands of asylum seekers have been transported from Florida, Arizona, and Texas, with over 6,000 of those transported coming from Texas. Amid criticism for his office's actions, Governor DeSantis has vowed to transport even more migrants from Florida stating that he plans to use "every penny" of the \$12 million his budget has allocated for the removal and relocation of migrants and asylum seekers from the state of Florida and from Texas that his "profilers" have determined are most likely to relocate to Florida.

All transports have been carried out without alerting city officials in destination cities, which has made it impossible for them to implement a proactive support plan for incoming asylum seekers. This has prompted city and state officials to express their concerns with being able to provide the resources needed to support those asylum seekers transported to their cities under false pretenses. Still, Martha's Vineyard, Washington D.C., New York City, and Chicago's communities, NGOs, and political leaders have rallied together to welcome and provide support and resources for asylum seekers who have been transported to their cities. The Lemkin Institute commends their dedication to providing humanitarian relief and support for asylum seekers that have been transported.

*The Lemkin Institute strongly condemns the xenophobia and white supremacy that fuel the Republican governors' cynical abuse of people seeking safety and a better life in the United States. The instrumentalization of human beings, especially vulnerable populations such as asylum seekers and migrants, as pawns in political stunts meant to demonstrate the *unwantedness* and *valuelessness* of specific categories of people, harkens back to some of the most clear early warnings of genocide in interwar Europe, such as Germany's expulsion of Polish Jews in October 1938. Providing false information to elicit consent for relocation is unethical and illegal.*

Withholding food, water, and information from individuals who are being relocated under false pretenses is cruel and inhumane treatment that violates the dignity and rights of migrants and asylum seekers, which is protected by the 1951 Refugee Convention and its Protocols. Furthermore, the failure of Florida, Texas, and Arizona's governments to insure that individuals' immigration information was up to date, and that people transported out of their states were aware of these updates, is a deliberate attempt to set them up for deportation out of the United States by making it intentionally difficult, if not impossible, for the asylum seekers and migrants to appear for required check-ins with immigration authorities.

The Lemkin Institute calls on the United States Department of Justice to conduct an immediate investigation into the actions of Governors Ron DeSantis, Greg Abbott, and Doug Ducey. The Institute further calls for federal and international support for Bexar County (Texas) Sheriff Javier Salazar's investigation into Governor DeSantis' actions. We also call for all three governors to face criminal prosecution for misleading and illegally relocating migrants and asylum seekers who are legally residing in the United States. Governors who abuse the laws of the United States of America, and who wantonly violate the dignity of human life, have no place in office. They should be impeached immediately.

The cities that have currently been impacted by these inhumane policies have openly discussed the limits of the resources that they have on hand to support migrants in their cities. Per the 1976 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, countries have a duty and a responsibility to protect all, regardless of "race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status," against inhumane and degrading treatment. Governors Ron DeSantis, Greg Abbott, and Doug Ducey and their state governments have already failed to protect these rights. The federal government holds the responsibility of helping states and cities to protect these rights. Therefore, the Lemkin Institute calls for Congress and the Biden Administration to prohibit these inhumane policies and to provide emergency federal funds for cities that have been chosen by Florida, Texas, and Arizona's governments as destination cities.

As Governors Ron DeSantis, Greg Abbott, and Doug Ducey have made it clear that they intend to continue relocating asylum seekers and migrants out of their states, the Lemkin Institute encourages cities that have taken on the responsibility of being a "sanctuary city" to work closely with immigration rights and humanitarian groups to develop a plan to support migrants and asylum seekers that could possibly be relocated to their cities.

Lastly, the Lemkin Institute condemns the xenophobia and white supremacy that fuel such state and federal policies on immigration. All humans, no matter their national origin or immigration status, have human rights that are protected by international law. These rights must never be infringed upon and must actively be protected. Holding political leaders accountable for their

white supremacist and xenophobic views and policies and ensuring that they face the consequences that come with violating human rights are critical if the United States wishes to continue to be a state based on the rule of law.