

## **The single mothers and children of the *Migrant Caravan***

Portrait series of Central American women fleeing domestic violence and joining the caravan to seek asylum in the United States.

“Hitting a woman for a man is as normal as eating a tortilla from a food stand on the way to work,” said Karen Paz, 34, from San Pedro Sula in Honduras, revealing a scar from a burn on her left shoulder. “He wanted to burn my face, but my daughter started screaming when she saw him taking the pan with boiling butter, she pushed him, and so he aimed for the arm instead.”

Men can do anything to women in Honduras, nobody does anything about it, not even the police, said Paz while scrolling on her phone to show me more images of the burn and trying to find the police report she filed right after the attack. “They detained him for only 24 hours, and then he came back home. I couldn’t stay there anymore, the next time he was going to kill me; my daughter could not witness that,” she said.

According to a March 2015 [special report](#) from the United Nation General Assembly in Honduras, domestic violence remains the leading reported crime at the national level. Between 2009 and 2012, 82,547 domestic violence complaints were lodged in courts across the country. Yet a low percentage of domestic abuse charges result in a conviction. According to the Special Prosecutor for Women. During the 2012–2014 period, 4,992 complaints were registered, with just 134 convictions. The Migration Policy Institute [found](#) that El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, respectively had the first, third, and seventh highest rate of gender-motivated killing of women in the world. Fewer than 3 percent of these murders are resolved by the courts.

I met Paz near her tent inside the Benito Juarez Sport Center in Tijuana, Mexico where the 5,000 plus Central American migrants of the first and second caravan arrived on November 15, 2018 after traveling the length of Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico on foot and the occasional ride on buses and trucks since departing from San Pedro Sula, Honduras, one of the most dangerous cities in Latin America on October 12, 2018.

Like Paz, were survivors of domestic abuse, but decided to flee their homes by joining the migrant caravan. It was a solitary, challenging, almost two-months journey by foot to answer the question: What does it take for a Central American woman to give their children a better future?

I found the answer by listening to these women’s testimonies and I decided to portray them not as victims, but as their most resilient selves, for no abuse can measure up to the courage and strength it took to carry their children across three countries for shot at a better life by asking for asylum in the United States.

What was an already uphill battle, winning an asylum case, was made nearly impossible by former Attorney General Jeff Session who in June 2018, ruled that domestic abuse and gang violence were not grounds for refuge in the US. His ruling overturned what the

previous administration had achieved, allowing more immigrants to cite credible fears of domestic abuse. Most of the women and children I've interviewed are asylum seekers who are on a waiting list with more than 5,000 people. For now they must wait in Tijuana's makeshift shelter for their turn to be heard, which could be until March. This long wait has made some of them start to think about crossing illegally instead of going through an official port of entry, which doesn't always grant them an asylum hearing.

Whether they know it or not arriving to the US border was only half the battle, they must now contend with an immigration and asylum system that is stacked against them.

"I'm a survivor of violence already; I cannot bring my daughters back to go through that herself," said Paz. "I feel different here. I don't have someone who imposes his views and ways on me. I am not scared someone will come and attack me, like I used to be. I cannot go back."