News

A woman holds a sign during a march and rally in support of immigration reform Oct. 16, 202

A woman holds a sign during a march and rally in support of immigration reform Oct. 16, 2021. (CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz)



by Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Washington — December 3, 2021

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

In front of the White House, a large group of women religious and their supporters shouted just a few feet way from the president's residence Dec. 3, calling him to end a Trump-era policy that keeps migrants out.

Though they were there to denounce a different policy, they called on President Joe Biden to end the Migrant Protection Protocols, or MPP.

Better known as "Remain in Mexico," the Trump-era policy that forces asylum-seekers to stay on the Mexico side of the border until their cases can be heard by U.S. immigration courts is about to restart.

Immigration advocates wasted no time in criticizing the restitution of MPP, saying the president has not kept a promise he made to get rid of it.

The Biden administration tried to end MPP with an executive order issued by President Joe Biden shortly after he was inaugurated that temporarily halted the policy. Subsequently, it was officially ended in June.

But in August a judge with the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas told administration officials to continue the policy, saying officials had not ended it properly. On Aug. 24 the U.S. Supreme Court refused to block the judge's ruling and ruled the administration had to restart the policy.

The administration has vowed to end MPP but said that, for now, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has to comply with the order and planned to restore the program at one location on or around Dec. 6, and then expand it.

"Reinstating MPP is a stain on our nation," said Anna Gallagher, executive director of the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, in a statement from the Interfaith Immigration Coalition, a group of 55 national, faith-based organizations, whose members spoke out shortly after the announcement of the policy's restitution.

Immigration advocates said it puts people in danger by forcing them to stay in dangerous border towns on the Mexico side that are ruled by gangs and drug dealers.

"It is a dangerous and deadly policy. As happened during its prior implementation, vulnerable men, women and children will suffer denigration, disrespect, assaults, rapes and murders," said Gallagher. "It is inhumane, unjust, and violates our obligations under our own legal system and international refugee law."

"Mr. President, we implore you to follow the Catholic values that form the foundation of your lifelong public leadership of our country," she said. "It is time to draw on those values and prioritize the lives of the suffering men, women and children waiting at our border over politics. It is time that you do what is humane and stop MPP."

In Texas, Attorney General Ken Paxton said the reimplementation was a "huge win for Texas" and via Twitter said it was needed to "restore safety and order along our southern border."

Advertisement

But faith groups, which included many Catholic advocates, reacted with great disappointment.

"We are deeply dismayed by the reimplementation of MPP," said Auxiliary Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville of Washington, chairman of the Committee on Migration for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

"Unfortunately, attempts by the administration to make this program 'more humane' — however well-intentioned — will not cure its inherent faults, nor will they alleviate its inevitable toll on human lives," he said Dec. 3.

"We are especially concerned that this will perpetuate the existing tragedy of family separation," he said, "since many mothers and fathers are likely to feel compelled to part ways with their children in a desperate attempt to ensure their safety."

The Interfaith Immigration Coalition said in its Dec. 2 statement that it wanted to express its "righteous anger at this immoral decision that will continue to deny migrants their internationally recognized right to seek asylum."

At the border, Dylan Corbett, executive director of the Hope Border Institute in El Paso, Texas, said it was time to restore protections, not take them away.

"We can no longer afford half-measures or backsliding and the return of 'Remain in Mexico' is a devastating step backwards," one which puts people in danger, he said.

At the event featuring Catholic women religious in front of the White House, a man named Santiago from Honduras, who was helped by the Jesuit-run Kino Border Initiative in the border area of Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Mexico, made a plea to Biden, saying "the border is a difficult place."

Having escaped a kidnapping and praising God for guiding him out of a potentially deadly situation, he pleaded for an end to measures that he said are putting people, including his family, in danger.

"The dead don't need asylum, the living do," he said.