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Migrant advocate flees Catholic-run shelter after death threats

by David Agren by Catholic News Service

Mexico City — An advocate for undocumented migrants has left a Catholic-run shelter in southern Mexico after receiving death threats, a statement from a coalition of nine Catholic and human rights organizations said.

Staff at the shelter, La 72, in Tabasco state reported receiving death threats June 8 in a call advising an activist, Ruben Figueroa of the Mesoamerican Migrant Movement, to stop impeding the activities of organized criminal groups. The suspected caller was arrested, along with three suspects accused of kidnapping migrants for ransom, but all were released June 10, the statement said.

The departure marks yet more difficulties for the shelter and its operator, Franciscan Father Tomas Gonzalez Castillo, whose work with undocumented migrants on the Mexico-Guatemala border has brought him into conflict with both criminals and government officials.

It also marks more problems for migrants as they transit Mexico -- especially in southeastern Mexico, where Father Gonzalez said they are now charged at least \$100 by criminals to climb aboard northbound trains. Migrants transiting Mexico are often kidnapped by gang members, who demand ransoms from relatives already living in the United States.

The June 12 statement, distributed by both the Diocese of Saltillo and Jesuit-run Miguel Agustin Pro Juarez Human Rights Center, said the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights had issued an April order to provide more protection for the shelter and its staff.

Federal police, however, have not maintained a permanent presence at the shelter, while other proposed security measures -- such as installing panic buttons and closed circuit cameras -- have not been carried

out.

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