



**Houston**

## **Ariz. Border Officials Will Indefinitely Continue To Process Hundreds of Illegal Immigrant Children**

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**NOGALES, Ariz. (AP)** — Arizona border officials will indefinitely continue to process hundreds of Central American children immigrants caught crossing the border illegally from Mexico into Texas.

Immigration authorities have so far provided few details about how many of those children are being flown from Texas to Arizona and how often, but in a statement said the flights will continue.

Arizona politicians have criticized the transfer of hundreds of migrant children to a state known for its immigration problem. But the mayor of a border town where the kids are being held in a

former warehouse said Monday that the conditions of their temporary housing were good enough.

Nogales Mayor Arturo Garino toured the massive facility Monday where state officials say about 700 to 1,000 mostly Central American children were sent after they were caught crossing into Texas.

The children are mostly on their own, complicating the influx of migrants last month to the Rio Grande Valley in Texas that overwhelmed the Border Patrol there. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security started flying immigrants to Arizona, where they were released and told to report to an Immigration and Customs Enforcement office near where they were traveling within 15 days.

Mexican immigrants caught crossing the border are usually deported immediately, but it is more difficult to deport migrants from Central American countries, especially if they are minors.

Immigration advocates have warned for months that they expect tens of thousands of unaccompanied minors to cross the border this year.

The number of unaccompanied minors from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras has soared more than 1,000 percent, according to Border Patrol data. In fiscal year 2009, border agents apprehended 3,304 such children from those three countries. This year, that figure is now more than 48,000 and expected to continue to grow. Meanwhile, the number of minors from Mexico crossing the border alone has dropped.

Many say the influx stems from word spreading that ICE does not hold children in detention and from misinformation about immigrant children who qualify for President Barack Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which protects some youth brought to the U.S. illegally from being deported. Others say the children are looking to reunite with parents who are already in the country.

Garino, the Nogales mayor, said the children he saw seemed to be in good care. They were in a facility that used to be one of the city's largest produce warehouses and were separated by gender and age, he said.

"The warehouse is very nice comparing to a lot of what I've heard. ... I'm very comfortable with it," Garino said.

Federal authorities plan for the facility to be transitional, where the children will be vaccinated and given medical checkups. They will then be sent to facilities being set up in Ventura, California; San Antonio; and Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer and other state officials have harshly criticized the transfers and called for them to stop, some even threatening criminal charges.

Maricopa County Attorney Bill Montgomery said Monday that immigration authorities may have violated state child abuse laws by dropping off women and children at Greyhound stations in Phoenix and Tucson a few weeks ago.

But border officials say that as long as the children keep coming, they need somewhere to hold them and expect to continue processing minors in Arizona.

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