

Nogales Final Draft-auphonic.wav

Mayor Arturo Garino: [00:00:04] We could be a city of five hundred thousand if there wasn't for the fence, if it wasn't for the border.

Enrique Unruh: [00:00:10] That's Mayor Arturo Garino. He's the mayor of Nogales, Arizona, the largest U.S. Mexico border city in Arizona. And the Mexican state of Sonora, he has been overseeing Nogales, Arizona's COVID-19 response.

Mayor Arturo Garino: [00:00:22] We have that cross-border travel that continuously goes back and forth, even though we don't have the big amounts of pedestrians and vehicular traffic because of the border closure for non-essentials. But there's still that travel. So so we're struggling a little bit, you know, and we've had people that passed away, friends, almost everybody knows one of the persons that passed away. And there's 107 people that are hospitalized right now. So we've had over 2000 cases for the city of Nogales, for the size of Nogales. That is that's a lot of people.

Enrique Unruh: [00:01:06] I spoke with made about it know in mid-July. And since then, the number of cases in the Nogales region has risen to just under twenty eight hundred one. A group in Nogales has been particularly impacted by the spread of COVID-19 and border closures, recently deported migrants.

Tracey Horan: [00:01:18] We have pretty much every day receive people who have been deported from detention centers.

Enrique Unruh: [00:01:24] This is Sister Tracey Horan. She works for the Kino Border Initiative, a Catholic organization in Nogales, that provide humanitarian aid to undocumented migrants. They've been apprehended and detained in Arizona. Then deported back to Mexico. The Kino Initiative operates in both the Arizona and the Sonora sides of Nogales.

Tracey Horan: [00:01:41] We generally have been receiving and providing services for three groups of people, people who had just been deported so who were either detained in the US, maybe had lived their long term and were deported, or we're just trying to cross through the desert. People returned under MPP, the Remain in Mexico policy. So who are seeking asylum were processed initially and then deported back to Mexico to await their court hearing.

Tracey Horan: [00:02:06] And then the third group, which are people who are awaiting asylum, who have arrived to Nogales but haven't been processed yet. We actually had a gentleman who is now living here in Nogales who's shared his story with us a number of times.

Tracey Horan: [00:02:18] He was detained in Arizona and actually is diabetic. And so he became really concerned about his health. And he was. He joined a group of people who decided to do a hunger strike within the detention center with the hope of convincing them to give them some kind of reprieve, some kind of humanitarian release to be with family. And so in his case, his wife and their children had already been released to family while they awaited their asylum court date. Whereas he remains detained. So he decided, you know, at one point it was between, you know, I'm going to stay here in detention and worry about getting the virus and possibly dying or am I going to self deport because he wasn't getting responses to any of his other requests for humanitarian release. And so he did

decide to self deport. And his wife and kids came to join him here in Nogales. And so this story is just one of many people who are just facing these really difficult decisions that they shouldn't have to face.

Enrique Unruh: [00:03:17] I ask permission to speak with these migrants and hear their perspective on the border shutdown. However, they felt uncomfortable talking to me directly since it might put them in danger and hurt their impending asylum cases to protect their anonymity. Sister Horan shares their stories.

Tracey Horan: [00:03:33] One of our big concerns is that they're actually deporting people to places that are more remote as part of a prevention through deterrence strategy with the idea that, you know, if we make it as unpleasant, difficult, dangerous and deadly as possible for people to do this, enter into this process of crossing through the desert, then people will just give up.

Enrique Unruh: [00:03:56] The concern that Sister Horan around speak to here is shared by other organizers at the Kino Border Initiative. Since the onset of COVID-19, the Kino Border Initiative has seen less migrants being deported to Nogales. Well, hearing more stories of deportations in smaller Arizona, Sonoran border towns.

Pete Neely: [00:04:11] I don't know how you can even compare it. There's just no comparison. The number of people dropped drastically, the people being deported.

Enrique Unruh: [00:04:18] This is Father Pete Neely, the assistant director for education at the Kino Border Initiative.

Pete Neely: [00:04:23] If they are deporting people through Sasabe, Sasabe is a town in the Arizona side. Sasabe is eleven people. That's the population. Eleven. And if they deport people over there, Sasabe, Mexico on the Sonora inside is about five thousand. But still, you can't deport, you know, one hundred two hundred migrants there each day. And there's no facilities, nothing for them.

Enrique Unruh: [00:04:48] I tried to ask Customs and Border Protection if they could confirm or deny claims of rising deportation through Sasabe. But the CBP is not allowed to share this information for matters of national security. Still, testimony of deported peoples points towards a shift in CBP deportation policy following the spread of COVID-19.

Tracey Horan: [00:05:06] I encountered some young people today who had just crossed through the desert, who were traveling from Guatemala. And this was like for one of them, this was their third or fourth time trying to cross in one month, and they had been deported several times in Sasabe. And so really, like in some of these smaller towns, I speak specifically to Sasabe because it's more remote and it's known to be a place that's dangerous, where there's a lot more gang activity.

Tracey Horan: [00:05:30] If someone is deported there, you know, I asked you, where did you all stay? It's really, you know, kind of remote town. I know they don't really have much in the way of shelters. And he said, well, you know, we found a motel to stay for a while. So I see it as part of their prevention through deterrence strategy. I think another piece of the puzzle is that there are these rapid expulsions. This is a new occurrence in recent history that the administration has decided again, under the guise of coping with CDC recommendations, that instead of detaining people, they're just going to do these rapid expulsions.

Enrique Unruh: [00:06:04] These rapid explosions have been approved by the government in light of COVID-19 under a public health article called Title 42. Under Title 42, Customs and Border Productions can deport migrants within a few hours of detaining them near the border instead of holding them overnight in detention center or accepting claims for asylum.

Mark Moran:[00:06:19] For safety and security of every American citizen. The administration's implementation of Title 42 has been a game changer to further reduce the introduction of COVID-19 into the US through illegal entry.

Enrique Unruh: [00:06:36] This is a recording of an August sixth press conference by Mark Moran on Title 42. He's Commissioner of Customs and Border Protection.

Mark Moran: [00:06:43] Title 42 has nothing to do with immigration enforcement. I'm going to say that again. I've said it before. I'm going to continue to say it. Title 42 has nothing to do with immigration enforcement and everything to do with public health, protecting American lives, reducing the spread of COVID-19, and helping our economy get back on track. CDC public health order under Title 42 allows us to swiftly process and return most illegal aliens back to Mexico or Canada without bringing them into our facilities and our congregate settings.

Tracey Horan: [00:07:21] This is not something new. There's definitely precedent to denying migrants due process when they're trying to cross, when they're crossing irregularly between ports of entry. But previously they would have been detained. They probably would have been taken up to Tucson if they were in that sector. And then they would have a court hearing where, you know, they would have access to a lawyer, to a public defender, although that process again usually they only have about 20 minutes with that person. So it's not to say that before, like, things were great and deportees were treated well. I think they were there's already a precedent for denying the rights of people that are seeking asylum or who are migrating. And it's only increased. It's only become more and more severe to the point that, you know, Border Patrol agents are simply ignoring any requests that people have of their credible fear and to seek asylum. So the assumption would be that somewhere in that process of being detained, having a court hearing, that they would be able to express that fear of returning. But in reality, there are so many times when people who even express that fear in the courtroom with a judge present that that fear never results in them getting a credible fear interview and never results in them actually being able to begin the process of asylum. That's how much our asylum process has just been broken down over and over.

Enrique Unruh: [00:08:45] Title 42 and the continuing spread of COVID-19 has forced Sister Horan and the Kino Border Initiative to adapt their operating procedures.

Tracey Horan: [00:08:52] The biggest change for us has been that the block of time that we're actually interacting with folks who are here in Nogales is a lot diminished.

Tracey Horan: [00:09:01] So instead of actually coming into the commodore and sitting down and chatting with us and having our volunteers or emerging groups that are visiting, serving people, we're serving the food outside and we're asking just one person per family to come and bring Tupperware for the whole family. And then we have the food stations out sort of in our porch area. So it's open air. They can come in and fill up all of their

Tupperware with food and we try to give them enough food for two meals. So a heavy, hot breakfast and then something like a salad and crackers for a meal later in the day.

Enrique Unruh: [00:09:36] As a Catholic organization, the Kino Initiative also provides religious services to migrants. COVID-19 has also forced that to change.

Tracey Horan: [00:09:45] In the past, we would have mass every Sunday, so we would have a Catholic service that migrants could come to and it would actually know would be packed with like 100 or more people in this tiny room. So our previous building was pretty small. And so, yeah, we wouldn't we would offer a mass every weekend. And that was always a really sacred space for people to come together and find hope. Now, we're not able to actually have people in the building due to the COVID restrictions. And so at this point, we are having mass every week, but it's limited just to the staff. And so it's still a way that we can gather and support one another. But unfortunately, because of the restrictions, we don't have that same that same way of coming together with the migrants.

Enrique Unruh: [00:10:27] In spite of all these changes, the Kerry initiative has been able to stay open and maintain its presence in Nogales.

Tracey Horan: [00:10:35] There's definitely hope in the fact that we're able to stay open even amidst the virus. There was a time when we were afraid we'd have to close down completely if someone on the team were to get sick or if there were to be an outbreak among the migrants. So, I mean, I'm grateful that we're still able to be a presence for folks who feel like they're being rejected by the U.S. immigration system, at least that presence can continue. So there's some hope in that for me.

Enrique Unruh: [00:10:58] The situation at the border is constantly changing. Nogales is just one of many border cities that has been hit hard by COVID-19 and the closures.

Mayor Garino: [00:11:08] It's been pretty tough.

Enrique Unruh: [00:11:10] Mayor Garino again.

Mayor Garino: [00:11:10] Luckily we've had some good executive orders coming in from the governor's office to help us so that we could take a little bit more control and with closures of certain things and wearing a mask and stuff like that. Hopefully that'll balance, you know, or put us in a plateau. Every day everything changes in Nogales. You know, one day I will be talking to you right now. Tomorrow, it's a whole different thing. It's unbelievable at the border.