

Human Rights Groups Denounce Police Assault on Migrants in Mexico

By David Agren

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MEXICO CITY (CNS) -- Catholic leaders and human rights groups have condemned the actions of Chiapas state police accused of indiscriminately opening fire as they chased a truck carrying approximately 45 undocumented migrants.

The Jan. 9 incident left three migrants dead and six seriously injured near the Mexican-Guatemalan border, said the Chiapas-based Fray Bartolome de las Casas Human Rights Center.

The center said in a Jan. 11 report that police "indiscriminately fired" until the driver lost control and struck a tree. Migrants interviewed by the center denied allegations that shots were fired at state police members from the vehicle. Local media reported that one of the deceased was a Chinese citizen while the other two were from Central American countries.

Bishop Felipe Arizmendi Esquivel of San Cristobal de Las Casas told the Mexican news agency Notimex Jan. 11 that the incidents of abuse against migrants crossing into southern Mexico, usually on their way to the United States, are common and that his diocese is building two new shelters to provide better assistance and protection.

"How is it possible that for passing from here to the northern border (smugglers) charge them \$5,000 -- that's an abuse -- then the abuses have to continue following them?" the bishop asked in reference to the shooting incident.

Mexico's National Human Rights Commission announced Jan. 12 that it would open an investigation into police actions it called "arbitrary" and "excessive."

Criminal sanctions for being in Mexico without proper immigration documents were discarded last year, but observers say that migrants are still preyed upon by unscrupulous public officials while traveling through the country.

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