

# Mexicans seeking political asylum

Leticia Calderón Chelius

The militarised struggle against drug cartels in Mexico that began in 2008 triggered an unprecedented increase in human rights violations against the population which found itself caught between the criminals and the armed forces and police. This in turn led to a mass exodus, with 230,000 people leaving the border region between 2007 and 2010 and some 20,000 dwellings abandoned. Many of these people had come from other parts of Mexico and returned to their home areas.

An estimated 124,000 people or more of those who decided to move crossed into Texas in the US; in the great majority of cases they had no intention of immigrating into the US before this episode of violence but were forced to flee from fear.

Crossing the border opens up legal issues that people seeking temporary refuge do not imagine. This is important in light of current heated debates in Mexico over internal displacement resulting from violence in the country. Crossing the border seems not to be a strategic choice but a practical one based on geographical proximity. Yet by doing so these people simply disappear from the IDP statistics, seeming to have joined the millions of Mexicans who have emigrated over many decades because of poverty and insecurity. In this way the problem of forced displacement is minimised and neutralised.

In 2009, there were 254 Mexican asylum seekers in the US. In 2010 there were 2,973, and in 2011 6,133 of whom only 104 – 2% of those requesting it – were

February 2014

granted asylum. In mid-2012 a group formed in the US calling themselves 'Mexicans in Exile'. Some 160 people decided that, having fled assassinations, extortion, disappearances and fear, rather than remain isolated and maintain a low profile a better strategy would be to publicly and visibly seek political asylum on the grounds that their cases had political bases.

Banding together in response to a situation of this seriousness gives people strength and confidence,

and provides emotional, social and – above all – legal and political support. Mexicans in Exile empowers its members and allows them to transcend the personal, demanding international justice for their situation in recognition of the difference between migrating out of fear and seeking political asylum.

Leticia Calderón Chelius [lcalderon@mora.edu.mx](mailto:lcalderon@mora.edu.mx) es Profesora/investigadora del Instituto Mora, México. [www.institutomora.edu.mx](http://www.institutomora.edu.mx)