

# Mexico blasts U.S. immigration policies

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MEXICO CITY --

President Felipe Calderon blasted U.S. immigration policies on Sunday and promised to fight harder to protect the rights of Mexicans in the U.S., saying "Mexico does not end at its borders."

The criticism earned Calderon a standing ovation during his first state-of-the nation address.

"We strongly protest the unilateral measures taken by the U.S. Congress and government that have only persecuted and exacerbated the mistreatment of Mexican undocumented workers," he said. "The insensitivity toward those who support the U.S. economy and society has only served as an impetus to reinforce the battle ... for their rights."

He also reached out to the millions of Mexicans living in the United States, many illegally, saying: "Where there is a Mexican, there is Mexico."

Since taking office in December, Calderon has maintained strong ties with the United States, but he has often denounced U.S. immigration policy, including more deportations that have divided many families, sometimes forcing U.S.-born children to build new lives in Mexico.

In one of the most high-profile cases, illegal immigrant Elvira Arellano was deported recently to Mexico after spending a year in a Chicago church to avoid being sent home. Her 8-year-old son Saul, who is a U.S. citizen, flew to Mexico on Friday to be reunited with his mother and said he plans to stay indefinitely, helping her fight to return to the United States.

Calderon addressed the nation Sunday from the National Palace, avoiding a showdown with leftist opposition lawmakers who had vowed to prevent him from making the speech in Congress, as Mexican tradition dictates.

Mexico's Federal Electoral Tribunal declared Calderon the winner of the July 2006 race nearly a year ago, rejecting leftist candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador claims that Calderon's narrow victory was fraudulent.

Calderon's predecessor, Vicente Fox, was also blocked last year from making his state-of-the-nation address in Congress after leftist lawmakers stormed the stage and refused to give him passage. The lawmakers claimed Fox unfairly aided Calderon's win, which Fox denied. Both are members of the conservative National Action Party.

Lopez Obrador refused to recognize Calderon's eventual victory and declared himself leader of a parallel government. But he has largely disappeared from the public eye amid sharp divisions within his leftist Democratic Revolutionary Party.

Calderon, meanwhile, has garnered some of the highest approval ratings in Mexico's history.

He said Sunday that Mexico has created 618,000 new jobs since January and needs to do more to close the giant gap between the rich and the poor. He also promised not to let up in his nationwide crackdown on drug gangs who control large swaths of Mexican territory.

"We can close our eyes to the reality, and because we are afraid or irresponsible, let organized crime take over our streets," he said. "Or we can decide to fight and defeat crime with all the risks and costs that implies."