

Mexican President Assails U.S. Measures on Migrants

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MEXICO CITY, Sept. 2 — President [Felipe Calderón](#) harshly criticized the United States government on Sunday for the recent crackdown on illegal immigrants, saying it has led to the persecution of immigrant workers without visas.

The Bush administration has stepped up raids on factories and farms suspected of hiring illegal workers, imposing heavy fines and deporting a record number of illegal immigrants in 2006. The United States Congress this summer failed to approve proposed legislation to revamp [immigration](#) laws to make it easier for Mexican immigrants to gain citizenship or temporary work visas, disappointing the Calderón administration.

“In the name of the government of [Mexico](#), I again issue an energetic protest against the unilateral measures taken by the Congress and the United States government that exacerbate the persecution and the vexing treatment against undocumented Mexican workers,” Mr. Calderón said in his annual formal address to the nation.

“The insensitivity shown toward those who have contributed to the economy and the United States society has been an inducement to redouble the struggle to recognize the enormous contribution to the economy of both countries and to defend their rights.”

As he has in the past, Mr. Calderón called on the United States Congress to pass changes to immigration law that would grant legal status to about 12 million Mexicans living and working illegally in the United States. He also reiterated his strong opposition to plans to build more fences and other barriers along much of the southern border. The assembled business executives and dignitaries gave him a standing ovation.

Criticizing the United States for its treatment of illegal Mexican immigrants has become routine for most Mexican politicians, including Mr. Calderón. Because the immigrants send home about \$20 billion a year and because the yearly migration of more than 400,000 people relieves Mexico of masses of the poor, the government here has little incentive either to stem the migration northward or to support stricter measures making it harder for Mexicans to cross the border.

As the United States has stepped up enforcement efforts over the last two years, it has sent more and more Mexican immigrants home, where they have little or no work. Last year, Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents deported 183,431 people after raids nationwide.

The border patrol, meanwhile, has reported steep declines in apprehensions along the border over the last year, suggesting that fewer people are trying to enter illegally in light of beefed-up patrols and new physical barriers.

In his speech, Mr. Calderón, who has acknowledged that he has relatives who migrated to the United States, suggested that the deportation of undocumented immigrants bordered on a violation of human rights, and he vowed to help illegal migrants.

“I have said that Mexico does not stop at its border, that wherever there is a Mexican, there is Mexico,” he said. “And, for this reason, the government action on behalf of our countrymen is guided by principles, for the defense and protection of their rights.”

American employers who ignore immigration laws may face criminal charges and higher fines under a new enforcement effort announced in August.

Last week, Mr. Calderón, a conservative, met with Elvira Arellano, 32, a Mexican who entered the United States illegally and became famous among advocates for Mexican immigrants for defying deportation orders and claiming sanctuary in a Chicago church for a year. In a meeting in his Los Pinos residence, he promised to help Ms. Arellano obtain a visa for the United States.

Mr. Calderón, who took office last December after a razor-thin victory, was forced to deliver his annual state-of-the-nation speech to an invited audience in the National Palace on Sunday because on Saturday leftist lawmakers refused to let him deliver it to Congress, as presidents have done traditionally. He sent it to Congress in writing instead.

Mr. Calderón also urged Congress to pass a tax reform bill, to open the energy sector to more foreign investment and to take other measures he maintains will make Mexico more competitive and will create jobs. He said his goal as president was to generate more wealth and distribute it more equally.

But he acknowledged that he must win over lawmakers to accomplish anything. “It is possible to transform Mexico, but it cannot be done by decree,” he said.