

As Tensions Build Over A New Caravan, Mexican Officials Seize The Man Who Organized The Last One

Adolfo Flores

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A video shows Irineo Mujica being shoved into a van by Mexican immigration agents and federal police.



Luc Forsyth

Irineo Mujica, director of Pueblo Sin Fronteras, last spring.

The head of the organization that led a caravan of hundreds of people toward the US border last spring, angering President Donald Trump and setting off a border crackdown, was detained by Mexican authorities on Thursday at a march in southern Mexico in support of a new group of migrants from Guatemala.

Irineo Mujica, the director of Pueblo Sin Fronteras, was detained along with three migrants, the organization said in a statement. The detentions took place in the Mexican city of Ciudad Hidalgo near the Guatemala border, where hundreds of migrants, many from Honduras, are gathering for a new US-bound caravan that has been called the "March of the Migrant," or "Caminata del Migrante."

"He was arrested along with three migrants by about 20 [immigration] agents and about 15 federal police as they marched toward a church as part of a welcome march for the Caminata del Migrante," the group said in a Facebook post.

Footage of Mujica's detention showed him being pushed into a van belonging to Mexico's National Institute of Migration (INM), which enforces immigration laws, by immigration agents and federal police in blue. People who had participated in the march could be seen screaming at authorities in protest.

Irineo Mujica, an organizer of the spring migrant caravan, was detained by Mexican immigration agents and federal police at a march in Ciudad Hidalgo, Chiapas in support of the new caravan coming up from Guatemala. Three other migrants were arrested as well. <https://t.co/EOxNQMxVjZ>

Mujica, who holds US citizenship, and other members of the spring caravan were in southern Mexico in support of the new group of Central Americans heading toward the Mexican border.

In a statement INM said Mujica attacked immigration agents, municipal police, and federal officers when he was asked for his identification. The immigration agency said he was detained by authorities for resisting, damaging property.

Mujica was illegally detained by Mexican immigration agents and federal police, Pueblo Sin Fronteras said in a statement calling for his release.

"Mujica has committed no crime," Pueblo Sin Fronteras said.

The organization also noted that the National Commission for Human Rights, which was there for the demonstrations in the morning and afternoon were not around for thirty minutes, during which Mujica's apprehension took place.

NBC News [reported](#) that the new caravan had grown to 4,000 people, far larger than last spring's caravan. That caravan triggered not only [angry tweets from the president](#) but also the [dispatch of National Guard troops](#) to the border, [new rulings about asylum law](#) from Attorney General Jeff Sessions, and [a "zero tolerance" policy](#) for border crossers that led to family separations.

Trump officials have been expressing growing concern about the caravan, which started its journey in Honduras before crossing into Guatemala on its way to Tapachula, the primary crossing point from Guatemala to Mexico.

As he did last spring, Trump threatened to retaliate against Honduras and Mexico if authorities in those countries don't stop the caravan from reaching the US.

...In addition to stopping all payments to these countries, which seem to have almost no control over their population, I must, in the strongest of terms, ask Mexico to stop

this onslaught - and if unable to do so I will call up the U.S. Military and CLOSE OUR SOUTHERN BORDER!..

[11:35 AM - 18 Oct 2018](#)

On Thursday, he responded to a tweeted video of Mexican troops arriving at the border by thanking Mexican authorities for taking action.

Thank you Mexico, we look forward to working with you! <https://t.co/wf7sE0DHFT>

[10:51 PM - 18 Oct 2018](#)

Tensions were high in Washington over the caravan, though its arrival at the US border is likely weeks away, if it is even allowed to cross into Mexico.

On Thursday, two senior White House officials — chief of staff John Kelly and national security adviser John Bolton — reportedly had a heated argument over how effectively the Department of Homeland Security was preventing migrants from crossing into the US.

[News reports](#) suggested the two men yelled at one another intensely, though the precise nature of their disagreement was unclear. Trump reportedly backed Bolton's position, however, which was said to be critical of Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen. Nielsen was not present during the dispute.

Pueblo Sin Fronteras has said it has no organizational role in the current caravan, but Mujica had run afoul of Mexican police [previously when he was arrested](#) in Tijuana in September. Mujica had gone with a group to a police building to ask about the arrest of a Honduran immigrant who was part of the first caravan.

While the Pueblo Sin Fronteras group asked questions about the arrest, said a member of the group, Jackson Davier Figueroa Maldonado, the police became aggressive, especially after the group started to record the officers. Then one of the officers said he was going to arrest Mujica for "public scandal."

"We defended him and said, 'No, don't arrest him,' and that's when four or five officers came out," Figueroa Maldonado told BuzzFeed News at the time. "They threw him on the ground and started to beat him."

Mario Martinez, director for the Tijuana police, said Mujica raised his voice at authorities. When police attempted to arrest him, Mujica resisted and hit an officer on his leg and abdomen, Martinez said.

More than 300 people from the first caravan, which at one point numbered more than 1,200 people, eventually entered the US to seek asylum. As many as 100 members of the caravan remained in Tijuana, where they are currently living or planning their next move.

On Tuesday, Mujica [told the Honduran newspaper La Prensa](#) that his organization was prepared to help the new caravan once it entered Mexico, but that he was not recommending a new caravan.

"The borders are crammed," he said, noting that the crush of Central Americans at the US border, the political tensions created by midterm elections in the US, and the Trump administration's criticism of asylum law have made immigration issues "difficult."

Still, Mujica traveled to the border with Guatemala to show solidarity with the new caravan.



Pueblo Sin Fronteras

An image from the video of Irineo Mujica being detained in Mexico Thursday.

CORRECTION

October 19, 2018, at 2:34 a.m.

Kirstjen Nielsen's name was misspelled in an earlier version of this post.