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on Next Page

# UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

AL OTRO LADO, INC., et al.,

Plaintiffs,

v.

ALEJANDRO N. MAYORKAS, et al.,

Defendants.

Case No.: 3:23-cv-01367-AGS-BLM

Hon. Andrew G. Schopler

**EXHIBIT 10 TO THE** DECLARATION OF STEPHEN M. MEDLOCK IN SUPPORT OF PLAINTIFFS' MOTION FOR PROVISIONAL CLASS CERTIFICATION

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**DECLARATION OF JOANNA WILLIAMS** 

I, Joanna Williams, hereby declare under penalty of perjury pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1746:

- 1. I am the Executive Director of the Kino Border Initiative (KBI). KBI is a binational, inclusive Roman Catholic organization, inspired by the spirituality of the Jesuits and Missionaries of the Eucharist, locally rooted in Ambos Nogales on the Mexico-U.S. border and with a regional approach organization throughout Central America and North America. KBI's mission is to promote humane, just and workable migration through: direct humanitarian assistance and holistic accompaniment of migrants; education and encounter between migrants and others that transforms people and communities towards solidarity with migrants; and policy advocacy in Mexico and the U.S.
- 2. KBI offers food, clothing, medical attention, and other humanitarian services in our aid center in Nogales, Mexico. KBI also offers shelter to women and children and to certain men at high risk of violence in the city of Nogales, Mexico.
- 3. As Executive Director, I oversee our organization's programming and strategy, lead our staff, engage with our Board on key governance issues, and ensure that we have adequate resources to carry out our mission.
- 4. I have a Bachelor's degree in International Culture and Politics with a focus on migration from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service and a Master's degree in Public Policy from Arizona State University. I have worked in migrant accompaniment and justice for over 12 years, including over 8 years at KBI. Prior to becoming Executive Director, I served for 6 years as the Director of Education and Advocacy.

- 5. In addition to our humanitarian services, KBI documents abuses that migrants report to staff members, and advocates for humane, just, and workable migration policy in the United States and Mexico.
- 6. In May 2023, KBI joined with The Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project and Human Rights First to conduct monitoring at the DeConcini Port of Entry in Nogales, Arizona after the end of Title 42. On June 9, 2023, we published our report, <sup>1</sup> explaining our findings.
- 7. Since May 17, KBI staff have had a daily presence at the DeConcini Port of Entry to offer basic humanitarian assistance, including food, to individuals and families waiting in Nogales, Mexico. We have continued our monitoring effort through that presence.
- 8. A few days after Title 42 ended on May 12, 2023, KBI staff observed that over a hundred individuals and families waiting in Nogales, Mexico, who had been unable to seek asylum in the United States due to Title 42, began to create an orderly line outside of the DeConcini Port of Entry in Nogales to present themselves at the port. KBI spoke with many individuals and families waiting, and most of these individuals had been attempting to obtain a CBP One appointment for months without success. Among those waiting in line were infants, young children, adolescents, pregnant and lactating women, individuals with serious medical conditions, Indigenous language speakers, and elderly individuals.
- 9. At the DeConcini Port of Entry, only a limited number of people are typically allowed into the roofed pathway leading up to the "limit line," the official entry point to U.S. soil, where CBP officers stand behind closed

 $<sup>^1</sup>$   $Available\ at\ https://humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/A-Line-That-Barely-Budges_Nogales-Arizona-1.pdf.$ 

- doors. The majority of the asylum seekers waiting remain outside the turnstile that demarcates the entrance to the port.
- 10.KBI staff has observed that CBP has failed to allow all but a small number of those waiting in line without appointments to present at the port of entry each day. CBP has not disclosed how many individuals are processed without appointments at the DeConcini Port of Entry.
- 11.Nogales has two additional pedestrian ports of entry. On July 7<sup>th</sup>, an asylum seeker from China reported to KBI staff that he attempted to approach the Mariposa Port of Entry and CBP officials at the limit line informed him that only U.S. citizens, residents, and visa holders were allowed to access the Mariposa Port of Entry.
- 12. Through interviews with people waiting in line and through monitoring the line ourselves, KBI learned that on most days in July only one family from the line has been processed at the DeConcini POE each day. On July 31st, KBI staff monitoring the situation at the Nogales Port of Entry spoke to people waiting to be processed without a CBP One appointment. People inside the turnstile at the POE, next in line to be processed, reported they had been waiting and sleeping there for 22 nights and still had not been processed. Also in July, a young Mexican woman with her infant son approached CBP at the Nogales Port of Entry to ask what she could do to seek asylum and the officer said they could not do anything.

# Mexican Municipal Authorities Create an Asylum Waitlist

- 13.At the DeConcini Port of Entry, a municipal authority in Nogales, Mexico called *Bienestar Social* has created a waitlist system for people waiting in Nogales to seek asylum in the United States.
- 14. The Mexican municipal authority initiated the list on or about May 25th and on May 27th began issuing a QR code that assigns a number on a

waitlist to each individual and family unit registered in line. On June 5th, KBI staff observed the municipal authority issue QR codes to new individuals and families and instructed them to leave the port of entry as they were last on the list and would not be called any time soon. The same day, KBI staff spoke with a single mother and her child who were waiting near the limit line outside the Nogales port of entry and were next in line. The woman told KBI staff that, two days prior, she had received a phone call from the municipal authority informing her that it was her turn to be processed and instructing her to return to the port. Because of that, she and her child had spent the last two nights sleeping outdoors at the port waiting to be processed.

- 15. Municipal authorities in Nogales, Mexico originally informed KBI in late May 2023 that they intended to close the waitlist after registering those individuals who were in line at the time and to disperse the line as soon as possible. However, by Thursday, June 1, 2023, the municipal authority had moved on to its third waitlist, with 100 people on each list.
- 16. According to reports from migrants, starting on or about June 28<sup>th</sup>, the representative of *Bienestar Social* claimed in conversations with migrants at the DeConcini Port of Entry that she would no longer add newly arriving individuals or families to the list. When KBI staff contacted her directly, including on July 3<sup>rd</sup> and July 6<sup>th</sup> as well as other dates, she claimed that she was continuing to add individuals to the list. However, since early July, KBI has consistently received reports from asylum seekers that they have attempted to add their name to the list but the list manager has refused to add them. On July 31<sup>st</sup> municipal authorities informed KBI that the list would be closed to new arrivals for two weeks.
- 17. While the waitlist system has permitted some asylum seekers to temporarily leave the line, its broader implications are troubling. List-

keeping at ports of entry in any form raises concerns about illegal metering, and Mexicans in particular – who are not even subject to the most recent asylum ban – are exposed to additional risk of harm because they are trapped in their country of persecution and forced to share personal information with government authorities who manage the list.

- 18.At present, there is no transparency or a mechanism for complaints, monitoring, or oversight of the list. Before the implementation of Title 42 in March 2020, the Mexican municipal government controlled a similar waitlist, which generated multiple allegations of corruption with no accountability or oversight mechanisms to address concerns. In late July of 2023, KBI began to hear rumors of individuals buying spots in line and on July 31<sup>st</sup> a migrant directly informed a KBI staff member that he had purchased his spot. KBI is concerned that cartels may be involved in selling these places in line.
- 19.Employees of *Bienestar Social* have dissuaded and misinformed asylum seekers waiting at the Nogales Port of Entry. KBI staff spoke with a Mexican asylum seeker who first arrived in Nogales in February 2023. He approached the port of entry on May 24, 2023 and was added to the waitlist and issued the number 88. On May 27th at around noon, the Nogales municipal authority arrived and began issuing QR codes. The municipal agency inappropriately asked whether the man had been deported to Mexico previously. He answered in the affirmative but was not provided an opportunity to explain that he had been expelled under Title 42, which does not carry the same immigration consequences as an order of removal under U.S. law. *Bienestar Social* told him that he had to leave the line because he no longer qualified for asylum in the United States and that U.S. authorities would not allow him to enter and would detain him. The

man tried to protest and explain that this wasn't a decision for the Mexican municipal agency to make but rather for the U.S. government; however, the municipal agency asked him to leave the line and to give his place to someone who "actually needed it." He was not allowed to speak and was not issued a QR code like others in line. The man was only able to access the port on June 4th because fellow asylum seekers in line immediately before and after him honored his place, despite the municipal authority's efforts to prevent him from seeking asylum.

- 20.On June 27<sup>th</sup>, the *Bienestar Social* staff managing the list shared with KBI staff that she was considering sending a man to the front of the line because his asylum case was "strong." KBI staff encouraged *Bienestar Social* to respect the order of the waitlist. This highlights the potential concern that people waiting at the Nogales port of entry—due to CBP's failure to process asylum seekers without CBP One appointments, most of whom are Mexican nationals—would not only have to give their personal information to a Mexican authority, but also disclose information about their asylum case to try to get priority in the line. This leaves them at risk of harm should the information reach cartels or other persecutors.
- 21.On June 12, *Bienestar Social* shared with our staff that two Russian nationals had arrived that morning and that *Bienestar Social* decided to put them at the top of the waitlist, bypassing the other approximately 300 individuals on the waitlist. CBP processed them immediately, granting them admission the same day they arrived at the line, while other individuals reported waiting over two weeks to be processed. This raises concerns about *Bienestar Social*'s administration of the list, since there is no oversight process or accountability.

### Issues with CBP One

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to seeking asylum, including the lack of sufficient CBP One appointments; financial, technological and other equal access deficiencies; and language

22. People waiting to seek asylum in Nogales, Mexico face numerous barriers

access deficiencies.

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- 23. While the number of appointments available across the entire border has recently increased to 1450 per day, a negligible portion of these appointments have been available to people waiting in Nogales. Currently, the Nogales port of entry only processes 70 persons a day with CBP One appointments. This means that less than 5% of all available appointments are allotted to the Nogales Port of Entry, one of eight total ports across the border where people can present via CBP One. DHS and CBP officials have stated that appointments are allocated based upon each port's capacity constraints, but it is inconceivable why the only port of entry with CBP One appointments for a span of nearly over 600 miles (from the California border to El Paso, Texas) could be so poorly resourced to process less than 100 asylum seekers per day.
- 24. In order to even attempt to secure a CBP One appointment, people seeking asylum must have daily access to a smartphone with certain capabilities, electricity, internet, and/or phone reception with data. The use of this appointment system – and the new asylum ban's provisions barring most people from seeking asylum if they do not have an appointment – prevents many vulnerable people who lack financial resources or access to technology from seeking asylum. Some families do not have phones or have had their phones stolen in Mexico. Other families seeking asylum

- have had to make the choice between going hungry and buying data for their phones.
- 25.Requiring a CBP One appointment for processing at a POE disproportionately impacts vulnerable populations, such as Indigenous people seeking asylum protection who face Indigenous language exclusion in use of the CBP One application, which is only available in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole.
- 26.KBI consistently receives new arrivals at our shelter who are Indigenous community members and Indigenous language speakers from southern Mexico and Guatemala who struggle to use the CBP One application. For example, two single mothers who are part of the Triqui indigenous group and are primarily Triqui language speakers had to flee from their home community. It was difficult for both of them to use the app due to language barriers, though one mother did end up obtaining an appointment. Out of desperation, the other mother and her baby child attempted to access the port without an appointment by joining the physical line at the port of entry in mid-May and were only processed after nearly two weeks of waiting outside day and night.
- 27.KBI staff has accompanied Chinese and Russian individuals who have only been able to access the app through the support of the KBI staff and KBI's use of translation services.
- 28.One KBI staff member has been attempting to assist an older Mexican man travelling alone in obtaining his appointment. When the man arrived in Nogales, Mexico he did not have a smartphone. The phone he was finally able to obtain has a camera with bad resolution and hasn't been able to take a photo for CBP One app. He has been coming regularly to KBI, where KBI staff lend him a different phone, but as of July 13<sup>th</sup>, 5 weeks after he

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initially arrived in Nogales, Mexico he has yet to obtain an appointment in part because of poor vision and a lack of technological proficiency.

- 29. Since its inception in January 2023, the CBP One application has been plagued with glitches and technical errors. New errors constantly emerge on the app and KBI staff have to try to troubleshoot together with the asylum seekers. For example, KBI staff have seen the app freeze with the message "unexplained error. Something went wrong. If this error continues close CBPOne and try again." In the past it was possible to resolve the error by closing the app and starting again, but KBI staff have seen 8 instances in early July, including as recently as July 13<sup>th</sup>, in which the error message continues to freeze the app even after asylum seekers have exited and restarted the application multiple times.
- 30.In mid-May 2023, KBI staff witnessed a Venezuelan woman who was notified of a CBP One appointment and had 23 hours to accept the appointment on the app. She nearly missed the deadline because the app's facial recognition software did not recognize her darker pigmentation. KBI staff observed her repeated attempts over hours and growing anguish as she moved to different spots within our fully-lit, bright shelter. We even placed strong lighting over her face. She ultimately succeeded in capturing her image after multiple attempts. However, had she not been able to secure such shelter in the first place, the woman likely would have missed her CBP One appointment for failure to confirm the appointment slot in time. Had she been displaced nearly anywhere else, in a dimly lit shelter, on the street, or waiting in line at or near a port of entry, the app's facial capture software would have likely failed this woman, as it continues to do for countless others.

Asylum Seekers Face Grave Danger While Waiting in Nogales, Mexico

- 31.Many people waiting outside the Nogales port have spent months struggling and failing to secure CBP One appointments. As they wait in Nogales, Mexico, asylum seekers are at risk of kidnapping, disappearance, rape, trafficking, and extortion. Many asylum seekers in Mexico suffer horrific violence at the hands of Mexican government agents and cartels, with many targeted precisely because they are migrants or seeking asylum in the United States.
- 32.In June, over 80 percent of new arrivals to KBI's Migrant Aid Center reported leaving their homes due to violence or persecution. Asylum seekers fleeing persecution in Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela have informed KBI staff that they were unable to avail themselves of the Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela (CHNV) parole "pathways" specific to their countries of origin that would except them from the asylum ban's application. The CHNV parole program requires long wait times of many months, each family member to have a valid passport from their country of origin, a U.S. sponsor who must initiate the application and have legal status within the United States, and other prerequisites that create barriers and often force those fleeing persecution to continue waiting in danger. Some of these new arrivals also shared that they had only learned of the parole process once in Mexico and were now disqualified due to their manner of entry into Panama and/or Mexico.
- 33.Most of those waiting in line at the DeConcini Port of Entry are Mexican asylum seekers. Many of the Mexican asylum seekers reported that they had been waiting in Nogales, Mexico for over a month. These Mexican individuals and families are not subject to the asylum ban for entering without a CBP One appointment, yet CBP has left them to wait for over a month, trapped inside their own country of feared persecution and at

- continued risk of harm. People fleeing persecution in Mexico, a country that directly borders the United States, cannot wait.
- 34. For Mexican individuals and families, the threat of persecution by those they are fleeing such as violent cartels and other organized crime groups that exercise control over territory and often work in collusion with Mexican authorities is still palpable as they are forced to continue to wait in northern Mexico in the hopes of finally having access to safety.
- 35.Many Mexican asylum seekers have shared with KBI staff that they feel unsafe because the Mexican National Guard and police force have taken photos and videos of them waiting in line without their consent. In general, it is less than a one or two days' journey from southern Mexican states to Nogales, Mexico, so an average wait time of a month or more leaves these Mexican families in great danger if their perpetrators can locate them quickly at or near U.S. ports of entry.
- 36. The week of July 9<sup>th</sup>, asylum seekers reported to KBI staff that while they were waiting to be processed at the port of entry, people in civilian clothes approached asylum seekers in the line saying that they had contacts in Washington, DC and could get people access to the asylum process. KBI later heard from other asylum seekers that those who went with those individuals were smuggled into the U.S. and abandoned in the desert. All asylum seekers waiting in Nogales, Mexico are at risk of harm, particularly those in immediate need of access to protection due to particular vulnerabilities or security risks. In mid-May 2023, multiple people reported to KBI staff that a group of men had recently arrived at the port of entry and beaten up a teenager who was waiting at the port of entry to seek asylum. A woman with the group recorded the assault on the teenager. The attackers threatened the migrants who had witnessed the attack,

warning that they needed to stay quiet about the attack or something even worse would happen to them.

- 37. In mid-May 2023, KBI staff learned of two young men who were waiting to seek asylum outside the Nogales port of entry and left the line to shower. On their way back, they were apprehended by an organized crime group and were searched, questioned, threatened, and robbed of their belongings. We were informed that the young men reported the incident to the Nogales municipal police, but the local police did not do anything.
- 38. Asylum seekers waiting in Nogales, Mexico also face serious public health issues. Soon after Title 42 ended, asylum seekers waiting outside the Nogales port reported to KBI staff that they did not have access to a public bathroom because it needed repairs. Local Mexican municipal authorities fixed the bathrooms temporarily but did not maintain them and the majority of the days KBI staff has witnessed that the bathrooms are out of service. These inhumane conditions led some families to decrease their water intake and resulted in dehydration and the spread of preventable, communicable illnesses such as gastrointestinal and respiratory illnesses that required evacuation of several children in need of urgent medical care.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States of America that the preceding declaration is true and correct.

Executed on this 3rd day of August, 2023 at Nogales, Arizona.

Joulle Joulle

Joanna Williams