

**From:** AAPNetwork <[aapn@memberclicks-mail.net](mailto:aapn@memberclicks-mail.net)>

**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] NYT: 'It Is Our Fault': El Salvador's President Takes Blame for Migrant Deaths in Rio Grande

We have dozens of members in El Salvador. We know for certain they have created tens of thousands of jobs. Their commitment to stability and investment in-country continues. They have done this despite not only lack of past government support, but outright anti-business, populist surprises. Our Salvadoran members and the industry waited to see what the recent elections there would bring them. The following article is one indication of promise.

### **'It Is Our Fault': El Salvador's President Takes Blame for Migrant Deaths in Rio Grande**

NYTimes: July 1, 2019

MEXICO CITY — The president of El Salvador was addressing the plight of thousands of his fellow citizens who emigrate each year — including a father and daughter who drowned last week while trying to cross into the United States — when he did something rare among leaders in the region.

He took responsibility.

"People don't flee their homes because they want to," President Nayib Bukele said Sunday at a news conference in San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador. "They flee their homes because they feel they have to."

"They fled El Salvador, they fled our country," he declared. "It is our fault."

Mr. Bukele's comments were remarkable in a region where political leaders have been averse to assuming responsibility for the social and political dynamics that drive migration and have generally paid only lip service to the idea that conditions must improve at home to dissuade people from leaving.

Driven by a combination of factors — including poverty, unemployment, rampant violence and government corruption — a steady stream of Salvadorans, along with people from neighboring Guatemala and Honduras, have fled their homes to seek a better life, most of them in the United States. The surge of migrants seeking to cross the southwest American border has been condemned by President Trump, who has sought to restrict immigration, including by those seeking asylum.

The governments of Central America have historically done little to discourage emigration, in part because the flow of citizens abroad has provided their nations with rich economic dividends: Migrants living overseas send home billions of dollars every year, helping to sustain national economies and alleviate poverty.

In 2018, Salvadorans abroad sent nearly \$5.5 billion in remittances to El Salvador, equivalent to about 20 percent of the nation's gross domestic product, according to the World Bank. "In some years, remittances constitute two or three times the country's public social spending," the Migration Policy Institute, a research group in Washington, said last year.

Most Salvadorans who have moved abroad have settled in the United States, with nearly 1.4 million living there — equivalent to about one-fifth of El Salvador's population, according to the institute.

But migration from El Salvador, and its perils, were highlighted last week with the publication of a photograph of the corpses of the young father and his daughter — Óscar Alberto Martínez Ramírez, 25, and his 23-month-old daughter, Angie Valeria — who were found lying face down in the Rio Grande, between Mexico and the United States.

Their bodies were returned to El Salvador on Sunday and they were buried in a private ceremony on Monday.

Mr. Bukele's comments on Sunday came in response to questions from reporters about the deaths and about what he intended to do to address the economic and security concerns that have pushed so many

Salvadorans to leave the country. One reporter invited him to comment on Mr. Trump's handling of migration, asking whether he thought the American president's approach was "lacking in humanity."

Rather than lace into his American counterpart, Mr. Bukele, who took office a month ago, turned the focus of his criticism on El Salvador and the failures of prior Salvadoran administrations to provide for its citizens.

"We can send all the blame to any government we like," he said. "We can say President Trump's policies are wrong. We can say Mexico's policies are wrong."

"But," he asked, "what about our blame?"

Mr. Bukele, 37, spoke in English, perhaps because he was responding to questions asked in English by reporters from foreign news networks, though he may also have intended to impart a direct message to Mr. Trump.

The Salvadoran president has said that he intends to work during his term to improve relations with the United States. He won the presidency in February by campaigning as an alternative to El Salvador's two long-dominant parties, which had held the office for three decades.

Among his promises, he has vowed to curb the outflow of Salvadorans, who have contributed in recent months to the surging numbers of migrants trying to enter the United States.

Mr. Trump has accused the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras — known collectively as the Northern Triangle — of not doing enough to curb emigration, and has moved to cut hundreds of millions of dollars in aid to those countries as punishment. Critics of the decision have pointed out that much of the aid is intended to address the social and political ills behind so much migration.

Cristóbal Ramón, an immigration policy analyst at the Bipartisan Policy Center in Washington, said Mr. Bukele's approach to Salvadoran emigration reflected a sharp departure from the posture of his predecessors and of the two parties that have dominated the nation's political landscape since the end of the civil war in 1992.

Past governments did not discuss emigration, he said, "because of their failures and their complicity in creating the conditions" that drove people to leave, including their parties' participation in the war.

Mr. Bukele, however, is a postwar politician who is independent of both the main parties. "His youth is almost an asset," said Mr. Ramón, who is the son of Salvadoran immigrants to the United States. "He doesn't have the historical baggage."

In his comments on Sunday, Mr. Bukele acknowledged the two main forces driving so many of his citizens to take their chances on a perilous migration north in search of a better life: economic duress and insecurity.

"They feel it is safer to cross a desert, three frontiers, and all of the things that may happen in the road to the United States because they feel that's more secure than living here," he said. "So we want to make our country safer."

He also vowed to address the poverty and lack of employment opportunities that so many migrants cite as their reason for fleeing.

"We will make a country that is more prosperous and that can provide decent paying jobs for all of our people," he said. "So if people have an opportunity for a decent job, a decent education, a decent health care system and security, I know that forceful migration will be reduced to zero."

But though he focused his comments on El Salvador's responsibility in spurring migrants to leave the country, he did not entirely spare the Trump administration his criticism.

"I think they are approaching this in the wrong way," he said. "History has shown that this will not stop migration."

He encouraged the Trump administration to support his government's efforts to improve El Salvador's economy and security situation. And he set a target of creating 200,000 to 400,000 new jobs, with the help of the United States.

"We agree on what we want to do, but for different reasons: They don't want our people, and I want our people here," Mr. Bukele said. "If they don't want them there, help us retain them here."