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racially profiled, because of racism on the part of police and immigration agencies," García explained in his office, making room for this interview in his especially busy schedule these days.

"This border is now one of the most militarized in the world with thousands of border agents, with high-powered weapons, unmanned aircraft systems. All this comprises a war in a country where there is no conflict, in this case with Mexico, but that war is against the migrants, especially during this administration of President Trump," García said.

He describes how the situation on the border worsened with "President Trump's campaign promise." As a candidate, "he used Mexicans and migrants in his campaign in an extremely negative way." He started a narrative in which he said that those who crossed the border were criminals, were rapists and promised not only the wall, "it is important to say that he promised the deportation of 5 million people who lived in this country," García said.

García analyzes that, from the beginning, Trump connected with those in the country who have "an anti-immigrant and racist agenda," getting many votes from the "most conservative and extremist."

Touting his anti-immigrant agenda, Trump began pressing for money to build the wall, which has not happened, but "takes away or wants to take from the Dreamers their dream. He tries to eliminate the Dreamers, to put them back into an illegal status, by taking away the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program."

Then after his inauguration, Trump "began ordering his immigration officers on the border and inland to raid across the country, trying to arrest people without documents. But since he does not have the money to get more agents for the raids, he promotes a new policy to rely on local and state police to do immigration work," García said.

García points out that state laws started to pass, as has happened in Texas, where the police are given the authority to ask for papers. "Then Trump's starting to have his deportation force to include the local police, which should instead be protecting the safety of everyone. Right now in Texas those police officers can request papers under a law called SB4," he adds. "Also, the National Guard has been deployed at the border.

"All this is part of a complete agenda, but what made the glass overflow, the drop that overflowed the glass, was the implementation of this program called 'zero tolerance,' which essentially says (and the administration talks about it like this), that anyone who crosses without documents between the ports of entry, those people are going to be criminally prosecuted. They're going to send them to court, and they're going to have charges filed against them. That's where the Justice Department comes in, which now puts its resources towards prosecuting each person."

"Even if it is the first time you enter, or even if you come asking for political asylum, you are charged. The truth is that under current immigration laws, crossing the border without documents is an administrative violation, such as running a stop sign or going over the speed limit.



PHOTO BY MONICA LOZANO

Ralliers took to the dried up Rio Grande at the "Abrazos no muros" celebrated last May.

However, what Trump is doing is criminalizing the act of crossing further.

"It is no longer an administrative matter but a criminal issue. Therefore, each person who passes will be stopped. We will put him in jail and we will prosecute him criminally," García said. "The consequence of this is that complete families are being detained.

"Yet Trump is not satisfied. He said, 'I am going to separate the children from those families who are detained,' putting the parents in some prisons and the children in other prisons. They did this to try and dissuade other families that are going to cross. It is an inhuman, harsh, aberrant strategy. That is what made this anger rise in the U.S.," he said.

García said that this is not the first time that they have separated the parents from their children and then detained them, when families crossed the border.

"This phenomenon of the separation of families has been constant in U.S. immigration policy," said García, who maintains that it is now happening in a broader context of harsh anti-immigrant policies.

But now, "the country discovered that there are children who were in cages separated from their parents," which, according to García, "touched a nerve in the country and people started to react. There has been a very strong reaction from all sectors of the country to an inhuman policy.

"Trump backs down a little bit and signs an executive order, which says, OK, I'm going to reunify them. But it does not stop the zero tolerance program nor the detention of families. The only thing that Trump is proposing is to reunite those children who have been separated, but keep them in jail. They will continue to be in jail, but now, together with their parents,"

García laments.

"It does not stop there. It turns out that after Trump's reunification announcement, the administration realized that it does not have a plan, that some parents have already been deported while the children are still in cages and that the administration does not know how to find many of the parents.

Parents and children are still in detention. But after having separated them, they do not have an effective system to tie each father or mother with their children. A disaster.

"I think the intention of the administration has not really been the reunification of families," García said. "To top it all off, Trump announces that he will continue to prosecute them criminally, and in addition, he will use military bases as detention centers."

One of those bases is in El Paso, Fort Bliss, where it is

expected that between 7,000 and 12,000 families will be kept under guard. "Instead of solving it, what he does is expand the detention of families, but now in military centers. How does one see that, having families in military centers?"

The perception that it may give you is that they are criminals, that they are a threat to national security, when really, they are workers. They are migrants, like when those who came to Ellis Island a long time ago, because that is why they are coming here.

"They are looking for a better life," the activist asserts. García explains that fair immigration reform is needed, starting by legalizing the 11 million to 12 million undocumented immigrants working in the United States.

"You have to make them citizens, because that is the tradition of the United States, to implement programs of workers who cross

the border legally. We need workers. It is not true that if there is unemployment in New York, New Yorkers will come here to El Paso to pick tomatoes. It is not true. This is only going to be done by immigrant workers. The problem is that now there are not enough visas. There is no worker program that provides them with fair wages and rights even to those that come to work temporarily. There are not enough visas for that," García said.

So people come between the ports of entry to pass undocumented or 'illegal,' as they call it. We have to fix the political system, García said. "There is no other option. We have to change it.

"But Trump goes in the opposite direction. He does not want those who already live here to be legalized and become citizens, and he wants to cut the legal migration in half.

"It is an agenda that has a clear component of rejection and hatred towards Latinos, Latino immigrants, immigrants from the south, because it does not have as much problem with Anglo immigrants. Obviously, this whole policy has a racist tinge.

"What we are betting on is that the country, not Trump, the country is realizing that these policies are aberrant. It is going to be the country. They are not going to be even the Democrats, nor any party. It is going to be the country. All sectors of the country are going to realize that it is not possible for the U.S. to defend the policy of imprisoning children, of building walls, of persecuting families. That is not what America, the U.S.A., has been," García continued.

"Are those values we cherish? Is not the unity of the family an American value? Don't we see Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty that says, give me your tired, your poor, those who are persecuted, give them to me? This was the idea of America in the 19th century. America was created as a country of migrants, that those who come seeking refuge, fleeing from persecution, find that this is their country, a land of opportunity, the promised land, just as when the Europeans arrived.

"This is why these new generations of migrants are coming. This border is the new Ellis Island. The emigrants arrive with that hope.

"I think that most Americans understand that the policy of imprisoning children is not what America represents. I believe that they are going to change this situation. I am not betting on the parties, nor Trump, not even the Democrats. I believe that the common American is the one who is going to say, we are more than that, or better than that."

The bittersweet balm of the World Cup on the border of horrors

It is eight o'clock in the morning on the American side of the Chihuahuan Desert, El Paso, and a dozen women and some men drink beer in the tavern, The Tap, where they arrived early on Tuesday, June 26 to watch the World Cup match between Mexico and Sweden.

"What do I serve you, handsome?" asked Mariana in Spanish. I order some huevos rancheros and coffee. An octogenarian gringo with a cap the colors of the Mexican