

Guatemala, Mexico families mourn missing teenage sons after migrant tragedy

NAHUALA, Guatemala/ATEXQUILAPAN, Mexico (Reuters) - Some of the youngest migrants thought to have died in a suffocating trailer in Texas this week set off from poor towns in Guatemala and Mexico, following in the footsteps of relatives seeking a better life in the United States.

On Thursday, residents in Nahuala, Guatemala mourned Wilmer Tulul, 14, and Melvin Guachiac, 13. The two cousins left home with dreams of learning English and reuniting with family, only to die in the deadliest U.S. human smuggling tragedy on record. At least 53 people lost their lives in the ordeal.

Home to an indigenous Quiche community, Nahuala is a town where little Spanish is spoken and which many migrants have departed. Some have sent back remittances that helped a few families build upscale homes. Still, most families in Nahuala earn a living growing corn and beans on small plots of land.

"My grandson said he had a dream," Wilmer's grandmother Pascuala Sipac said, speaking in Quiche through a translator. "He made the journey but (the dream) never arrived." Family members confirmed his and Melvin's deaths after seeing photos sent from a San Antonio morgue. Both families honored the boys with modest altars outside their homes, displaying photos of the youths alongside bright flowers.

Wilmer set out from Nahuala near dawn on June 14 for Houston, where his older brother migrated last year. The family related how it took a loan to pay a smuggler 35,000 quetzales (\$4,500) and his brother was to pay more after Wilmer arrived.

At 3 a.m. on Thursday, family members left in two vans, bringing official documents for a drive of several hours to Guatemala City to help identify the boys. Like other families across Central America and Mexico, they want closure over the sudden loss of loved-ones left to die in a truck on the threshold of a new life across the U.S. border.

Hundreds of miles away, in the small town of Atexquilapan in eastern Mexico, Teofilo and Yolanda Olivares are hoping for information about their sons Jair, 19, and Yovani,

16, who they last heard from on Monday morning when they messaged that they were waiting to be picked up and taken to San Antonio.

The parents are convinced their sons were on the truck, along with their cousin, 16-year-old Misael. But authorities have not told them yet, they said. "It's very difficult for me to think about everything they went through," said Yolanda. "It's consuming me from the inside not knowing about them." Teofilo said his sons left Atexquilapan on June 21, following other cousins who migrated eight months ago. The boys crossed the Rio Grande on Friday.

"They had dreams of getting ahead... They had plans to open a business," said Teofilo, a shoemaker. Hermelina Monterde, Misael's mother, said her son had ambitions to go beyond the family's shoemaking tradition. "He saw the work we do, where we're seated all the time, constantly seated, and it hurts our back. He said, 'I want to go (to the United States) to work and support you all'," she said.

Teofilo said the family agreed to pay a smuggler 200,000 pesos (\$10,000) for each of his sons to be taken to the United States and that he had to pawn his home to make the payment. "I don't know what I'm going to do," he said. The family is asking U.S. authorities to grant them humanitarian visas so they can find their sons. "I don't want a visa to go work or to visit, I want a visa to go see my sons, who I wish were here," said Teofilo, fighting back tears.