

Video released of death of migrant woman stuck on US-Mexico border wall

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Bodycam footage of a migrant woman's death in an encounter with US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) on March 21, 2024, was released on July 17 after being suppressed for five months.

The footage, viewable here, shows the woman stranded for an excruciating 24 minutes atop the 30-foot-tall wall which runs along the California-Mexico border, calling out for help, and her subsequent death after plummeting from the top of the wall. The victim was identified afterwards as 24-year old Petronila Elizabeth Poma Perez, a Guatemalan national.

In the same month, 10 people, including children, were seriously injured while attempting to cross the San Diego border wall in what was described as a "mass casualty" event. The taller 30-foot segment of the wall was installed under the Trump administration in 2019, leading to an immediate and lasting increase in the number of falling deaths along the border, with local hospitals seeing a five-fold increase in falling injuries along the wall.

Many are left with spinal injuries and permanent disfiguring injuries. More women than men were admitted to local hospital UCSD Health with injuries sustained scaling the border wall in 2023. According to a doctor at the hospital, Dr. Alexander Tenorio, these injuries were not seen before the 30-foot wall was installed.

The US-Mexico border is the deadliest land crossing in the world, according to the International Organization for Migration, which documented 686 deaths or disappearances in 2022. Many more deaths are certain to have gone uncounted, with those seeking to get into the US dying in extreme desert heat in inaccessible areas or drowning in waterways like the Rio Grande, which makes the border between Texas and Mexico, and the All-American Canal which runs parallel to the California-Mexico border.

Despite it being over two weeks since the release of the video of Perez's death, most of the corporate news only

reported on the release in the past few days.

According to a press release from the CBP on the incident, migrants were spotted at 10:27 p.m. with agents reporting via service radio that "multiple individuals were approaching the secondary International Border Fence approximately 2.7 miles west of the Otay Mesa Port of Entry and were carrying a ladder. At this location, the secondary International Border Fence is approximately 30 feet tall and is constructed of vertical metal bollards. The north side of the secondary fence has an electrical conduit running across the top of the fence, which facilitates the use of an electric gate nearby."

In the radio transmission, one CBP agent could be heard referring to migrants not as persons, but as "bodies": "I got one body running through the truck lot. First body just went behind dirt mounds ... Bodies are east of the dirt mounds, heading north."

The first agent arrived at 10:30 p.m. The San Diego Fire Department was called at 10:31 p.m. in order to render aid to Perez, who was on the north side of the 30-foot tall secondary fence.

An agent in between the primary and secondary fences warned Perez, who was by this time on top of the fence, not to cross over to the north side. She attempted to scale down the north side of the wall but was unable to continue after being confronted by the CBP agent who insisted she "stay there, do not get down."

In the bodycam footage, the agent identified as Agent 2, could be heard speaking to a migrant from Nicaragua. He questioned her about where the others in her group had gone while Perez was still stuck on top of the wall.

According to the CBP press release: "At approximately 10:34 p.m., an unknown individual approached the north side of the fence from a nearby commercial lot and notified the agent that his coworker had a ladder available. The agent advised the individual that they could not utilize any ladders until fire department personnel

arrived.”

The agent made no attempt to ascertain if the ladders the worker had in mind were sufficient for the job, if there was anyone else who could help the woman, or anything of the sort. The suggestion by the worker was dismissed out of hand.

That is, they were prevented from rendering aid to the woman which could have saved her life. The prerogative of the agent was, unsurprisingly, to apprehend her first and worry about issues like loss of life later.

There was also a ladder, a “tactical style” ladder consisting of a singular pole with staggered steps on either side clearly visible near the agent that was presumably used by Perez to climb to the top. Perez was told to stay there and “do not go down.” From the bodycam footage, the question arises whether Perez would be alive if she were allowed to descend or if the agent permitted workers to help her.

Fourteen minutes in, a fire engine and another CBP agent in his truck arrived but on the wrong side of the wall, as a result of the CBP officer’s directions, causing a considerable delay as the long fire engine was unable to navigate the narrow opening on the wall at that section, being forced to take the longer way around. This proved fatal.

Perez pleaded for help for another 14 minutes, after which she said she was “going to fall” and subsequently fell to her death at 10:54 p.m. hitting an elevated concrete base on the north side of the secondary wall, suffering severe head injuries. Just a minute before, an agent on the north side of the fence drove off to meet with other agents to coordinate the transportation of other migrants after showing up just three minutes prior. The fire truck did not arrive until 11:04 p.m.

At 11:05 p.m. the fire department conducted a medical assessment noting she had no pulse and attempted to resuscitate her with CPR. Perez was pronounced dead at 11:17 p.m. over the phone by a physician from a local hospital. Later, police showed up and at 1:20 a.m. her body was taken into custody by the San Diego County Medical Examiner’s office.

The same month that Perez fell to her death, it was reported in the corporate news that a new anti-climbing device was installed on the border wall in San Diego, no doubt under the Biden administration’s direction. News Nation ran a segment on the wall and justified it with its false and xenophobic sub-headline “surge in immigrants crossings overwhelms US.” An immigrant advocate on the program pointed out that the new feature would lead

to more deaths.

From bodycam footage, it did not appear that an anti-climbing device was at the specific section where Perez was, but the general consequence of such actions is to increase the number of deaths along the wall.

Whether they suffered on the razor-blade death buoys installed in the Rio Grande placed by the fascistic Texas governor Greg Abbott, on the anti-climbing walls on the California section of the border wall, in the Pacific Ocean, the Sonora Desert or the Baboquivari Mountains in Arizona, these deaths are the result of a deliberate policy. They are social murders perpetrated by both parties of the US financial oligarchy, the Democrats and Republicans.

The Democrats have played a key role in the militarization of the border, even finishing sections of the border wall started under Trump and limiting the number of asylum seekers in flagrant violation of international law in order to reach a deal with the fascist Republican Party on funding for the US-NATO imperialist war with Russia.

While Perez’s immediate reason for leaving Guatemala is not known, the reasons for refugees leaving Central and South American countries are well known. Guatemala has a poverty rate estimated at 55.1 percent in 2023 by the World Bank. Connected to this, it also has one of the highest income inequality rates in South and Central America and one of the highest rates of violent deaths among women, with one woman or girl dying violently every day.

Guatemala was the subject of a CIA coup in 1954. Exploitation by the imperialist bourgeoisie, in collaboration with the Guatemalan national bourgeoisie, has kept the vast majority of the country’s population impoverished, as is the case with the rest of South and Central America.



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