

# REFUGEES FROM CENTRAL AMERICA OVERWHELMING SOUTHERN FLORIDA

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## **Body**

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MIAMI - A solid stream of Central American "bus people" poured into Dade County this past week, getting an uneasy reception from civic leaders and Nicaraguans who settled here shortly after the 1979 revolution. Mayor Xavier Suarez sought an emergency meeting with President Ronald Reagan, and other local officials urged President-elect George Bush to come see the situation for himself. A mass of homeless, hungry Central Americans arrived Thursday and Friday in Greyhound buses. They were the first wave of people pouring in from southern Texas after a federal judge ruled that the government no longer could keep them there. Most are from Nicaragua, escaping the guerrilla war or the economic disaster it has caused. At least 400 have arrived since the judge issued his ruling Monday, and local officials expect 100,000 more in the next 18 months. "The current system is out of control and unfair to Florida," said Sen. Bob Graham, D-Fla. "If Washington learned anything from (the 1980 Mariel boatlift), it's that America must have an immigration policy based on order and fairness." The Mariel boatlift brought 125,000 Cubans to southern Florida over five months. Local authorities shouldered most of the cost of resettling the refugees. The current situation is so serious that authorities have been forced to house about 250 Nicaraguans in Miami's Bobby Maduro Stadium, the spring-training home of the Baltimore Orioles. After immigrants jammed the bleachers and dressing rooms, officials closed the stadium's doors and declared it full to capacity.

Beans and rice were cooking in the concession stands. Children were swarming around a card table loaded with glazed donuts. Adults were talking about getting apartments - and jobs. Liliana Romero washed a bundle of sheets and clothing, using detergent, cinder blocks and a stadium groundskeeping hose. She hung the wet, clean clothes on a batting-cage frame and talked about her family's future in America. "We don't want money for food or clothing," she said. "We're used to working." Her son, Jader, 5, rode a toy sports car near her. "His future is here," she said. City workers were trying to move the homeless immigrants into apartments but were having a tough time persuading landlords to take them. Not many were willing to forgo the typical prepayments of the first month's rent, the last month's rent and security deposit. Ana Gispert, a city worker, said: "What we don't want is a room in exchange for work." Some of those offering the immigrants a place to stay or a job proposed deals that bordered on exploitation, the social workers explained. The number of Nicaraguans in Dade County has been growing since the Sandinista Revolution of 1979. But some Nicaraguan residents regret the flood of people now, because it saps the opposition in Nicaragua. In addition, most of the new arrivals are poor, unskilled and illiterate - unlike the Nicaraguans, most of them educated and middle-class, who came to Miami in the early 1980s. Officials in southern Florida fear that the new immigrants will strain already overcrowded schools, housing and public-health services. Isidoro Cuevas, Cuban-born mayor of Sweetwater, said his city would have trouble absorbing the aliens. Sweetwater is a heavily Nicaraguan city in western Dade County. "We've been trying to gather clothes and food to pass it on to them," he said. "But there are many dwellings shared by more than one family already. People are sleeping on the front porches, sleeping on the couches." Other local officials reacted in various ways: Dade County Manager Joaquin Avino called on the federal government to curtail the flow of Nicaraguans from Mexico, to grant work permits to those who have already arrived and to reimburse governments in southern Florida for costs related to the new immigrants. Miami City Manager Cesar Odio said, "We are putting pressure on the federal

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government to accept responsibility for something they have created." **Florida** Gov. Bob Martinez was preparing a plea to U.**S.** Attorney General Dick Thornburgh for federal aid. The Dade County government even sent a delegation to the Texas border to try to persuade Nicaraguan immigrants not to come to **southern Florida** unless they have families willing to help. Dade County officials met Friday with the mayor of Brownsville, Texas, a **South** Texas border city. The delegation put out the word that Miami cannot handle **refugees** who have no place to stay. It also inquired about allegations that Brownsville has been subsidizing the \$89 one-way fare to Miami for some of the **refugees**. Brownsville Mayor Ygnacio Gacza responded: "Any rumors that we are actively promoting Miami are false." More than 30,000 **Central** Americans passed through **southern** Texas this past year, seeking political asylum, the Immigration and Naturalization Service said. The most-recent flow to Miami resulted from a federal judge's order Monday lifting a government travel ban on 5,000 **refugees**. They had been restricted for weeks to the Brownsville area. The judge allowed them to travel to other U.**S.** cities while their claims to be granted political asylum were being processed. Most immediately chose Miami. (3\* edition continuation) Outside Bobby Maduro Stadium, Jose Paez, 39, said Friday that he had arrived from Texas two days before and had been sleeping on the ground outside the stadium. "When they gave us the green light Monday, immigration people told us that we would be taken care of in Miami," Paez said. "Unfortunately, when we got here, they told us they couldn't let us in."

### Graphic

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Photo; PHOTO by AP...Nicaraguan **refugees** sitting among their belongings Friday outside the Bobby Maduro Stadium in Miami. (photo appears in 3\* edition)

### Classification

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