

Panama starts first US-funded repatriation flight

Panama started on Tuesday its first deportation flight of irregular migrants who entered the country through the Darien jungle, local media reported. This constitutes the first of a series of flights financed by the US Department of State to return irregular migrants to their home countries.

According to local media, the first flight repatriated 29 individuals to Columbia. For migrants from other countries, Panamanian authorities are coordinating with the authorities of those countries to organize deportation flights. However, no repatriation flights to Venezuela will be conducted because of the diplomatic situation between the two countries.

All the deported people had illegally entered Panama through the Darien jungle, or the Darien Gap, which is a border jungle separating Panama and Columbia. It consists of more than 60 miles of dense rainforest, steep mountains, and vast swamps and is considered one of the most dangerous migration routes. As it is the only overland path connecting Central and South America, and due to the crackdown on alternative routes by sea and air, migrants and asylum seekers have been increasingly crossing this region in order to get to the US. In addition to the harsh natural conditions, migrants crossing this jungle also endure violence and abuse from gangs operating in the area. Most of the migrants originated from Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador and Haiti.

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