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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR ERIC ADAMS APPEARS ON CBS'S "60 MINUTES"

Anderson Cooper: For months, buses from the U.S. - Mexico border carrying tens of thousands of men, women, and children from Central and South America have been arriving in New York, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. They were organized by the Republican governors of Texas and Arizona and the Democratic mayor of El Paso, and paid for mostly by taxpayers. Greg Abbott, Texas's governor, said the buses would give the liberal sanctuary cities a taste of what his state has had to deal with for years. Many of those coming to New York are Venezuelans fleeing poverty, violence and authoritarian rule and hoping to apply for asylum. But the process can take years. And for much of that time, they aren't allowed to work. Caring for these new arrivals has been a big challenge, and it's drawn attention to a longstanding and bipartisan failure to fix the nation's broken asylum system.

When the buses began arriving at New York City's Port Authority Terminal from Texas without warning in August, city officials had to scramble. On some days, as many as eight to 10 buses rolled in filled with men and women carrying children but no luggage. Last month, we met an engineer, a taxi driver, some college students, and construction workers. They were welcomed by Spanish-speaking volunteers from local nonprofit groups who gave them water and food and donated winter coats.

Standing nearby, Ledys Gomez was crying. She told volunteers she'd been separated from her husband and 18 year old son by border officials in Texas. Her seven year old daughter was with her. To get to the U.S., like many Venezuelans, they'd made their way through seven Latin American countries and a perilous stretch of jungle.

Ledys Gomez: It was very difficult because in the jungle, we ran out of food and we ran out of water. And a child was shot. There were a lot of dead people. This is my first time immigrating, and I did not know humans were capable of so much evil.

Cooper: How were you treated when you crossed the border in the U.S.?

Gomez: Well, you can interpret my silence, you can interpret my silence. I didn't like being separated from my son.

Cooper: Gomez has told us she was thankful for the kindness volunteers at Port Authority had shown her. They'd even given her daughter a doll.

Gomez: Thank you for treating us well. It's been a while since we were treated well.

Cooper: Within an hour, the volunteers had found her son at a homeless shelter in Manhattan and brought him to Port Authority to reunite with his mother and sister. Ledys Gomez later found her husband too. Her family now lives in one of 58 hotels the city has turned into emergency shelters at a cost of about \$200 a room per night. Unsure how many people would ultimately come and how much it would cost to provide them with food, shelter, medical care, and other services, New York's mayor, Eric Adams, declared a state of emergency last month.

(Audio plays.)

Mayor Eric Adams: We are in a crisis situation.

(Audio ends.)

Cooper: This past week, Adams told us more than 22,000 migrants have arrived in the city so far.

This is a city of, what, eight million people. Why would the arrival of 22,000 new people be such an emergency?

Mayor Adams: We're a city of eight million people that just came through the pandemic. Many of our residents lost their jobs, they lost homes. We already had crises that we were navigating and dealing with.

Cooper: Governor Abbott said that the buses would bring the reality of the crisis of the southern border to liberal cities. And it has done that, hasn't it?

Mayor Adams: No, I disagree with that. He created this humanitarian crisis by his human hands, his actions. There was nothing that prevented him from communicating with our team and saying, "How do we coordinate this so we don't overburden another municipality?"

Cooper: And his argument would be, "Well, we don't know when migrants are going to cross the border illegally, so why shouldn't these other cities get a taste of that?"

Mayor Adams: Okay, is his fight with the national policy or is his fight with New Yorkers?

Cooper: It is a stark reminder that the system is broken, is it not?

Mayor Adams: Yes. The system has been broken. We have kicked this can down the road.

Cooper: Democrats, Republicans in Congress, nobody has clean hands on fixing this at this point.

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Cooper: More than seven million people have fled the political, social and economic chaos in Venezuela so far. It's the second-largest refugee crisis in the world after Ukraine. 187,000 Venezuelans who crossed the border from Mexico into the United States last year have been allowed to stay here while they apply for asylum, but the process now takes years. More than three quarters of a million people from all over the world are already in line ahead of them, waiting for an asylum hearing or a final decision. Many more are waiting just for an opportunity to apply.

Theresa Cardinal Brown, Managing Director, Bipartisan Policy Center: The asylum system has collapsed, yeah.

Cooper: Theresa Cardinal Brown, a former immigration policy advisor in the Bush and Obama administrations, is now a managing director at the Bipartisan Policy Center, which tries to find common ground on major national issues.

Cardinal Brown: There are millions of people arriving to our southern border who are trying to seek protection, trying to avail themselves of our laws, and we just don't have the personnel, the resources, the infrastructure, or the right processes to manage what's happening there well right now.

Cooper: Do you have a sense of how long it is, somebody who's arriving just now at the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New York, how long it's going to be before they actually have an asylum hearing?

Cardinal Brown: On average, people who are not detained by immigration and customs enforcement might wait three to five years.

Cooper: Three to five years. Are they allowed to work during that time?

Cardinal Brown: No. Once you've formally filed your asylum claim in immigration court, 180 days later, then you can apply for work authorization. It could be four years, four and a half years before you can ask for work authorization.

Cooper: In the meantime, Brown says asylum seekers find themselves in limbo. They're here, but they can't legally work.

Edward: We don't come here to be a burden to this country, I come to work and push ahead.

Cooper: Edward and Maria, who met in college in Venezuela, asked us not to use their last names out of concern for their relatives back home. It took them six weeks this summer to get to the United States with their nine year old son and one year old daughter. They're now living in a hotel in the Bronx that was turned into an emergency shelter. But without work permits, they're struggling.

Edward: I found a job at a supermarket. I worked for three days, and he didn't give me... He didn't pay me. Nothing. I lost my time.

Cooper: You got taken advantage of.

Edward: My fear is if I go to complain, he calls the police on me. And I thought, no, they'll deport me. And that was my fear so I left it like that.

Cooper: Like many migrants we spoke with, Edward and Maria no longer have their Venezuelan passports, ID cards, or birth certificates. They say they were told to hand them over to US Customs and Border Protection agents in Texas and never got them back.

Edward: Well, they put it in a folder. They said, "Whenever you go to court, you can ask for them there."

Cardinal Brown: That's interesting.

Cooper: Theresa Cardinal Brown says US Customs and Border Protection regulations are clear. All documents must be returned unless they're fraudulent. We interviewed 16 migrants who arrived in New York by bus from Texas. All but four said they had important documents taken and not returned. And volunteers, case workers and lawyers who work with the migrants also told us the problem is widespread. In a statement, US Customs and Border Protection said it was reviewing its policies and practices to ensure that documents are returned to the migrant, absent a security or law enforcement reason.

One bright spot for many migrant families has been the New York City public school system which, in a period of three months, enrolled about 7,000 new students, most of whom don't speak English. 10 year old Cesar Romborges now goes to P.S. 145 in Manhattan. His family made the long journey from Venezuela to Mexico and then crossed the treacherous Rio Grande River into Texas.

Do you remember what it was like coming here? Was it scary?

Cesar Romborges: Sí.

Cooper: "Yes," he says. What was scary?

Romborges: When my mom almost drowned in a river.

Cooper: And you saw that happen?

Romborges: Sí.

Cooper: Yes.

The principal at P.S. 145, Natalia Russo, says she's been doing her best to help Cesar and the other new students adjust. She does some students' laundry at her home and has made sure they have school uniforms, supplies and help getting into after school programs.

What do you say to other families who see what's being done for these new kids?

Natalia Russo, Principal, P.S. 145: My answer to that is that this is a humanitarian crisis. These folks don't speak the language, they're not part of this culture yet. Because we just want the children to feel safe, not only physically, but emotionally. We'll do whatever it takes.

Cooper: Cesar and other children of asylum seekers will likely be fluent in English by the time their parents have their asylum cases ruled on by a judge. And if they fail to make their case, they and their kids could face deportation.

How tough is it to make a case that you should get asylum?

Cardinal Brown: It's very tough. It's very tough. The legal requirement is that you have to have been persecuted or have a well-founded fear of persecution.

Cooper: So if somebody says, "Look, I'm coming here because I want a better life for my children ..."

Cardinal Brown: That doesn't qualify for asylum.

Cooper: So most of the people who are showing up at the Port Authority Bus Terminal saying that they want to seek asylum, when they can get in front of a judge most of them will not actually be granted asylum?

Cardinal Brown: I can't say that for sure. What I can say is that overall asylum rates are about 30 percent. Venezuelans tend to have a much higher asylum rate because of what's happening in Venezuela.

Cooper: In the past few weeks, the number of buses from the border arriving in New York has decreased significantly. That's because the Biden administration announced it was creating a legal pathway for 24,000 Venezuelan asylum seekers to enter the US if they had sponsors, but it also began expelling Venezuelans to Mexico if they'd crossed the border illegally.

They basically went back to a policy that was in place, put in place by the Trump administration which allows for Venezuelans to be sent back to Mexico and not apply for asylum here in the United States.

Mayor Adams: I think that the national politics is well over my head on determining what we're doing nationally.

Cooper: Do you think people who come to this country and want to seek asylum should be able to work while they're here waiting?

Mayor Adams: Yes, I do.

Cooper: Doesn't that encourage more and more people just to come?

Mayor Adams: No, I don't. I don't think it creates a problem. What we should be asking is "Why is it taking so long?" We should let people know right away, "Based on a preliminary review, you cannot get an asylum here in the country." And then those who are eligible and reach a minimum criteria, we could put on a faster track.

Cooper: The Bipartisan Border Solutions Act introduced in Congress would make that possible by adding more immigration judges and asylum officers and building four new processing centers along the southern border where the government could determine whether migrants have a credible fear of persecution before they're allowed to stay in the U.S.

Theresa Cardinal Brown, the former policy advisor in two administrations, says she'd like to believe Congress will finally do something to fix the problem. But she's skeptical.

Cardinal Brown: For 30 years they haven't passed really any substantive change to any of our immigration laws.

Cooper: Is this a Democratic failure or Republican administration failure?

Cardinal Brown: It's both. At some point they've got to decide that fixing it is better and necessary more so than using it to try to win the next election.

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