

# Mexico City-to-NYC-relay calls for migrants' right to vote

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MEXICO CITY - Mexican migrants launched a two-month relay Sunday from Mexico's capital to New York, calling on lawmakers to grant them the right to cast absentee ballots in 2006 presidential elections and organizing undocumented workers along the way.

The binational relay is in its third year, following a 3,800-mile route through northeast Mexico, then the southern and eastern United States, with runners carrying a torch to New York City in honor of Mexico's patron saint, the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Some 5,000 runners will carry the torch, sometimes passing through farm towns with only a few people, and other times - like when the torch passes through Atlanta, which has a rapidly growing migrant population - with thousands cheering them on.

The group is scheduled to arrive at New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral on Dec. 12, when Mexicans commemorate the day in 1531 when, according to legend, the dark-skinned virgin appeared to a poor Indian, Juan Diego, and left her image imprinted on his cloak.

Mexican migrants living in New York always celebrated Dec. 12 at St. Patrick's, leading pilgrimages from their neighborhoods but wishing they could travel to Mexico City's Basilica, as many Mexicans pilgrims do.

In 2001, at the urging of the Roman Catholic Church, they decided to try it, planning a trip that would take them from the Basilica to St. Patrick's. Each year, the march has grown.

The route is expected to cross the border at Brownsville, Texas, on Nov. 7, then travel through Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Washington, D.C., Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

Under current Mexican law, Mexicans must return home to vote.

Although there is a proposal under discussion that would grant Mexicans the right to vote while living abroad, it appears to have little chance at approval because of controversy over how to avoid fraud.