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## U.S. attorney general curbs asylum for immigrant victims of violence

Reade Levinson, Sarah N. Lynch



WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions on Monday overturned a grant of asylum to a Salvadoran domestic abuse victim, potentially excluding immigrants seeking refuge from sexual, gang and other forms of violence in their home countries.

The decision to refuse asylum to the Salvadoran woman, whose former husband raped and beat her for 15 years, narrows who can qualify for asylum when they become victims of criminal

activity, as opposed to government persecution.

Sessions' finding followed his unusual move to intervene personally in the case known as the "Matter of A-B-." The woman, who is only identified by her initials, had won an appeal to the Board of Immigration Appeals, which had overturned a lower immigration court judge's denial of her asylum petition.

"In reaching these conclusions, I do not minimize the vile abuse that the respondent reported she suffered at the hands of her ex-husband," Sessions wrote in his order.

"I understand that many victims of domestic violence may seek to flee from their home countries to extricate themselves from a dire situation or to give themselves the opportunity for a better life," he continued. "But the 'asylum statute is not a general hardship statute,'" he said, citing an earlier immigration case.

An attorney for A-B, Karen Musalo, called the decision "devastating" and said it had been anguishing for her client.

"You have a woman who barely survived more than a decade of horrific violence, who finally feels that she secured safety ... and now she's thrown into total turmoil again," said Musalo, who directs the Center for Gender and Refugee Studies at the University of California Hastings' law school.

The woman could still potentially appeal the case again to the Board of Immigration Appeals, then a federal appeals court and ultimately the U.S. Supreme Court.

Sessions' decision drew immediate rebukes from dozens of immigration rights advocate groups and lawyers. Some said the decision could have wide-ranging impacts on immigrants fleeing gang violence and gender-based violence, including female genital cutting or honor killings.

"This is not just about domestic violence," said Musalo. "What Sessions is doing is a broader, frontal assault on women's' rights."

Michelle Brané, director of the Women's Refugee Commission's Migrant Rights and Justice program headquartered in New York, said, "Attorney General Sessions' decision to limit the reasons why people can claim asylum is a devastating blow to families who come to our country seeking protection and safety."

"This administration continues to swiftly deconstruct America's moral code and values by doing everything possible to limit access to asylum."

U.S. House of Representatives Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi joined those denouncing the decision.

"The Trump Administration's inhumanity and heartlessness know no bounds," Pelosi said in a news release. "Republicans in the White House have just condemned countless vulnerable, innocent women to a lifetime of violence and even death, just to score political points with their base."

It was not immediately clear how many cases the decision could affect.

Unlike the federal judiciary system, U.S. immigration courts fall under the Justice Department's jurisdiction, and the attorney general can intervene.

In immigration court, certain opinions published by the Board of Immigration Appeals, the highest immigration court, serve to set national legal precedent. However, as the United States' chief law enforcement officer, the attorney general can intercede in its decisions to shape law.

Sessions has been unusually active in this practice compared to his predecessors by exercising his intervention authority to make it harder for some people to legally remain in the United States.

In making his determination, he declared that a decision in a 2014 case before the Board of Immigration Appeals, which allowed victims of gender-based violence to claim U.S. asylum, "was wrongly decided and should not have been issued as a precedential decision."

He remanded the case of A-B- back to Judge Stuart Couch in Charlotte, North Carolina, for further proceedings.

An investigation by Reuters last year found that Couch orders immigrants deported 89 percent of the time.

Monday's decision marks Sessions' latest effort to greatly restrict immigration. Cracking down on illegal immigration and tightening legal immigration were major themes of President Donald Trump's 2016 campaign.

FILE PHOTO: U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions delivers remarks at the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund's 30th annual candlelight vigil in Washington, U.S., May 13, 2018. REUTERS/Joshua Roberts

Earlier this year, Sessions declared he would attempt to ensure that every person who crosses the border illegally would be prosecuted, and he has staunchly defended a new policy of separating women and children at the border, including those seeking asylum.

Reporting by Reade Levinson and Sarah N. Lynch, additional reporting by Mica Rosenberg, editing by G Crosse and Jonathan Oatis

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## BUSINESS NEWS

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# Google to invest \$550 million in Chinese e-commerce giant JD.com

Reuters Staff



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SINGAPORE (Reuters) - Google will invest \$550 million in Chinese e-commerce powerhouse JD.com, part of the U.S. internet giant's efforts to expand its presence in fast-growing Asian markets and battle rivals including Amazon.com.

FILE PHOTO: A logo of JD.com is seen on a helmet of a delivery man in Beijing, China June 16, 2014. Picture taken June 16, 2014. REUTERS/Jason Lee/File Photo

The two companies described the investment as one piece of a broader partnership that will include the promotion of JD.com products on Google's shopping service. This could help JD.com expand beyond its base in China and Southeast Asia and establish a meaningful presence in U.S. and European markets.

Company officials said the agreement initially would not involve any major new Google initiatives in China, where the company's main services are blocked over its refusal to censor search results in line with local laws.

JD.com's investors include Chinese social media powerhouse Tencent Holdings Ltd, the arch-rival of Chinese e-commerce leader Alibaba Group Holding Ltd, and Walmart Inc.

Google is stepping up its investments across Asia, where a rapidly growing middle class and a lack of infrastructure in retail, finance and other areas have made it a battleground for U.S. and Chinese internet giants. Google recently took a stake in Indonesian ride-hailing firm Go-Jek, and sources have told Reuters that it may also invest in Indian e-commerce upstart Flipkart.

Google declined to comment on the rumored Flipkart deal. The JD.com investment is being made by the operating unit of Google rather than one of parent company Alphabet's investment vehicles.

Google will get 27.1 million newly issued JD.com Class A ordinary shares as part of the deal. This will give them less than a 1 percent stake in JD, a spokesman for JD said.

FILE PHOTO: The logo of Google is pictured during the Viva Tech start-up and technology summit in Paris, France, May 25, 2018. REUTERS/Charles Platiau

For JD.com, the Google deal shows its determination to build a set of global alliances as it seeks to counter Alibaba, which has been more focused on forging domestic retail tie-ups. Japan's SoftBank Group Corp, which is making big internet investments around the globe, is a major investor in Alibaba.

"This partnership with Google opens up a broad range of possibilities to offer a superior retail experience to consumers throughout the world," said Jianwen Liao, JD.com's chief strategy officer, in a statement.

Company officials said the deal would marry Google's market reach and strength in analytics with JD.com's expertise in logistics and inventory management.

(This version of the story has been corrected to remove erroneous reference to JD.com's partnership with Carrefour in paragraph 4. A typo in paragraph 6 has also been corrected.)

Reporting by Jonathan Weber; Editing by Stephen Coates

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