

HUNGER STRIKES AT I.C.E. DETENTION CENTER

On June 14, 33 women who have been detained and incarcerated by Immigration & Customs Enforcement (**ICE**) in California's Adelanto Detention Facility launched a hunger strike. They were protesting the poor conditions at the facility as well as the policies that were keeping them away from their children and loved ones. This is not the first hunger strike in Adelanto this month. Two days before, nine men launched a hunger strike protesting these same conditions. They had arrived with a refugee caravan from El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala claiming asylum at the U.S. border. Instead, they were detained and sent to Adelanto.

Since March 2017, three people have died at Adelanto. Others have reported medical neglect and, on at least one occasion, being punished for seeking medical care. Norma Gutierrez, one of the women on hunger strike has suffered multiple strokes during her incarceration at Adelanto. Instead of receiving proper medical care, she was placed in solitary confinement. Such medical neglect is not new; Human Rights Watch and CIVIC (Community Initiatives for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement), found that Adelanto has had ongoing failures in providing medical care to detainees, including extended delays in responding to medical requests, overmedication of people with mental disabilities, the use of shackles during psychiatric appointments, a lack of continuity of care for those with chronic conditions, delayed or denied care for people whose removal seems to be imminent, and denial of care or misdiagnoses for people with serious conditions or diseases.

Among the women's demands were better medical care, respectful treatment by prison staff, an end to ICE's unreasonably high bonds, and reunification with their children and families. According to Christina Mansfield, co-founder and co-executive director of CIVIC, many of the women had been detained for over six months by that point. "We want them to speak to us like we are humans, not animals. We don't want to be disrespected and cursed at," Sara Salcido, one of the women on hunger strike, told Mansfield.

On Monday, June 12, they refused to return to their assigned beds for count, a practice in prisons, jails and immigrant detention centers in which all movement stops while each and every person is counted. But that morning, the nine men locked arms; in response, guards pepper sprayed them and put them in isolation. Advocates said that guards also physically beat the men, a claim that ICE officials disputed in an email statement, saying that the guards "applied the necessary degree of force to extract the resisting detainees from the residence unit and transfer them to a restricted housing area." Shortly after, six of those men began refusing food.

The men issued nine demands: a fair bond for all detainees, political asylum, new uniforms — especially new underwear — instead of clothes previously worn by other people, more time for religious services, paperwork provided in their own languages, 24-hour access to clean water, better food, and an end to throwing away their belongings. They also demanded that they be released on their own recognizance rather than remain detained for their inability to pay bond.

The women were aware of the men's actions, Mansfield said. Hoping to avoid similar forms of retaliation, they asked that their names be made public. That Wednesday morning, as 33 women refused to eat breakfast, Mansfield received another call from inside. According to the women calling her, guards had threatened the women with pepper spray, solitary confinement and confiscation of their belongings if they continued to refuse food.

However, that afternoon, 20 of the women, all of whom had been unsuccessfully seeking health care, were taken to see medical staff. Jail staff also agreed to treat the women with respect, including respecting their religious freedom. However, ICE officials told the women that they have no control over the bonds. In reality, however, the Department of Homeland Security, which oversees ICE, has the authority to grant conditional parole and release a person on their own recognizance rather than set bond.



By dinner that evening, the women had ended the hunger strike. In the limited communication Mansfield has received since, none of the women have reported retaliation. But that doesn't mean that Adelanto staff and GEO administrators are not on the alert and ready to quash any future signs of activism or solidarity.

On June 20, one week after the women's hunger strike and two weeks after the men's, CIVIC and over 60 faith leaders and attorneys boarded a bus to head to Adelanto, 85 miles outside of Los Angeles, to visit the people detained inside. Upon disembarking, the group held a five-minute interfaith prayer outside the facility. In response, GEO staff not only denied the visitors entrance, but also placed the entire facility on lockdown and kicked out the attorneys and family members who were already inside waiting to visit.

Though ICE's federal standards mandate that detention facilities provide 24-hour access for attorneys to visit their clients, Christina Fialho, an attorney as well as CIVIC's other co-founder and co-executive director, was denied visits with 14 of her clients despite having received prior approval from ICE. Other attorneys were denied entry as well, including those who had not come or were not affiliated with the bus from Los Angeles.

"When we see abuse in detention, it is our moral obligation to speak up and stand in solidarity with our friends in detention," Fialho stated. "By denying us access after a peaceful and short prayer, ICE has tried to make us choose between our First Amendment rights and visiting our friends and clients in immigration detention. This is not a choice our government can legally ask us to make."

The Adelanto Detention Facility, with a capacity of 1,940, is the largest private immigration detention facility in the United States. Run by the GEO Group, ICE pays \$111 per person per day for the first 975 detainees, thus guaranteeing GEO a minimum of \$40 million each year. If more than 975 people are detained inside Adelanto, the daily rate drops to less than \$50 per day.

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