

Saying #MeToo In Immigration Detention

Saying #MeToo in immigration detention often leads to more pain and trauma,” said Christina Fialho, executive director of Freedom for Immigrants, an immigrants rights group formerly known as CIVIC. “A person in immigration detention can’t just pick up and leave — they’re often forced to interact with the individuals who perpetrated the sexual abuse. And if they dare to speak up, they’re often retaliated against and then re-victimized by an ineffective or nonexistent investigative process.”

Yet despite legitimate fears, women and men held in immigration detention centers across the country have been trying to say “me too” for years. Their stories, told in formal complaints filed to an uncompassionate and confusing bureaucracy, almost never yield justice or see the light of day.

To uncover some of these stories, nearly two years ago The Intercept and CIVIC filed a public records request with ICE asking for all complaints and investigations of sexual and physical abuse in immigration detention. Despite repeated follow-ups, ICE never complied with the request. A similar public records request filed with the Department of Homeland Security’s Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties also went unanswered. Only the results of a third FOIA request, filed with the DHS Office of Inspector General, which is tasked with independently reviewing the department’s various agencies, including ICE, led to the reports obtained by The Intercept.

In the reports, detainees describe alleged assault and harassment ranging from brutal gang rape to sexually explicit verbal abuse. They also detail widespread institutional indifference, when not outright complicity, in response to that abuse. Some of the reports read as first-person narratives or verbatim emails or letters detainees wrote; others are accounts of incidents summarized by ICE staff or contractors. DHS officials redacted most names of victims and alleged perpetrators, but accidentally exposed at least a dozen names.

Of the 1,224 complaints it received in that time period, the Inspector General investigated 30, according to the data released to The Intercept. The office also investigated an additional 13 cases over the same time period that do not match the



complaints provided to The Intercept, bringing the total number of investigations to 43.

But the sheer number of complaints — despite serious obstacles in the path of those filing them, as well as the patterns they reveal about mistreatment in facilities nationwide — suggest that sexual assault and harassment in immigration detention are not only widespread but systemic, and enabled by an agency that regularly fails to hold itself accountable. While the reports obtained by The Intercept are only a fraction of those filed, they shed light on a system that operates largely in secrecy, and they help hint at the magnitude of the abuse, and the incompetence and complicity of the agency tasked with the safety of the 40,000 women, men, and children it detains each day in more than 200 jails, prisons, and detention centers across the country.

Detention facilities are also periodically inspected for compliance with other detention standards, but despite mounting allegations of abuse, the agency routinely gives its facilities passing marks. Earlier this month, the ACLU and nine other organizations wrote a letter to DHS officials denouncing ICE’s failure to comply with the detention standards set by Congress. In the letter, they criticized the

agency’s “unregulated self-assessment” and added that “a close look at the inspections themselves reveals alarming evidence that they are sham assessments.”

Madhuri Grewal, a policy counsel with the ACLU, told The Intercept that “rampant violations” of those standards are commonplace. “Our bottom line is that ICE just receives too much money to detain immigrants,” Grewal added. “If they had less detention facilities and less detention, it may be a little bit easier for ICE to actually conduct rigorous oversight and accountability.”

“A lot of people don’t complain,” said Gretta Soto Moreno, a transgender woman who was held in detention centers in Arizona and California, and filed dozens of formal complaints about the constant abuse she was subjected to. “As soon as you make a grievance, if you defend yourself, you become a personal enemy of the system. Even if the system stinks and is corrupt. Grievances only go to the next officer,” she added, “and they take care of each other.”

“ICE has no incentive to be transparent about sexual assault happening within its facilities because it would confirm what we already know: that the agency tolerates the abuse of people in detention,” said Fialho of Freedom for Immigrants, which directly documented 27 cases of sexual assault in detention, including the rape of a woman by a detention facility official.

“There are people who are dying in detention, who are being sexually abused in detention, and there is very little recourse for those folks whose rights are being violated,” said Victoria Lopez, one of the ACLU attorneys who filed the petition. “There needs to be greater justification for destruction of these records, on any kind of timeline, because of the seriousness of the records themselves.”

In December, 71 members of Congress signed a letter calling on the departments of Justice and Homeland Security to appoint a special commission to investigate allegations of sexual abuse in immigration detention, and urging the DHS to publicly release data on sexual assault and other abuse that the agency is seeking to destroy.

If ICE has its way, thousands of complaints like those obtained by The Intercept will eventually be destroyed, wiping out a record that is a damning indictment of the failures of our immigration detention system.

Complete text available from
theintercept.com

UNITED STATES OF ISRAEL

We know what Trump’s breaking of the Iranian nuclear deal means — quite apart from his lies and fraudulent arguments about the original agreement: *the United States is now a part of Israel’s foreign policy*. The Arabs used to say that Israel was an American state. Now the US has become part of the Israel state. Trump’s infamous speech contained seven references to “terror” in relation to Iran — “state sponsor of terror”, “supports terrorist proxies”, “reign...of terror”, “a regime of great terror”, “funds...terrorism”, “support for terrorism”, “the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism” — and so on and so forth. This is almost as good as Benjamin Netanyahu’s speeches at the UN.

I was trying to think just who Donald Trump reminded me of. I used to think about the boastful, gung-ho racist Theodore Roosevelt, the ‘Rough Rider’ who enjoyed war (and threats). But Theodore Roosevelt actually did win the Nobel Peace Prize. And then I realized. The political leader who most resembles Trump is the late Colonel Gaddafi of Libya.

The parallels are quite creepy. Gaddafi was crackers, he was a vain, capricious peacock of a man, he was obsessed with women, he even had a ghost writer invent a ‘Green Book’ of his personal philosophy, just as Trump had his business manual written for him. Gaddafi was vengeful towards his opponents but his views on the Middle East were odd, to say the least. He once advocated a one-state solution to Israel and Palestine which — in all seriousness — he suggested should be called ‘Israel-tine’. A bit like moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Trump’s White House is now like Gaddafi’s tent, which the Libyan leader took with him everywhere. Trump’s late-night television viewing was not unlike Gaddafi’s insistence that business must be done in his tent. Gaddafi’s handshake was legendary — so was his kiss from Tony Blair, who was as obsequious to Gaddafi in Libya as Theresa May was to Trump in Washington. Much good did it do Blair or May.

Gaddafi ran his business dealings through his family — now there’s a thought — and even maintained good relations with Russia. His speeches were interminable — he liked the sound of his own voice — and although he constantly lied, his audience was forced to listen and to fear his wrath. Above all, Gaddafi was completely divorced from reality. If he lied, he believed his own lies. He believed that he kept his promises.

He believed in the world *he* wanted to believe in, even if this was non-existent. His Great Man Made River Project was supposed to Make Libya Great Again.

If all this seems flippant, there is a weird parallel between Trump and other Middle Eastern leaders — the ex-Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad comes to mind. He claimed that a holy cloud appeared over his head when he spoke at the UN and then denied he’d said this — until an Iranian political opponent produced the videotape. I wonder, after Trump’s latest, disgraceful performance, we’ll soon hear from Ahmadinejad again. The only other man whom we might compare to the American president, I suppose, is Korea’s “little rocket man” himself — whom a few hours ago appeared to be the man who might provide Trump with that Nobel Prize. Dare one utter the obvious words: *Ye Gods!*

And *we are supposed to believe*, like children, that Shiite Iran is supporting Sunni Muslim al-Qaeda — when it’s been fighting al-Qaeda in Iraq and Syria. *We are supposed to believe* that Iran’s long-outdated “intelligence documents” provide “definitive proof” that Iran’s promise of not pursuing nuclear weapons is a lie. But what is America worth now — in the Middle East or anywhere else (North Korea comes to mind) — when it can so blatantly tear up an international treaty agreed by the US government itself. That used to be what some European leaders — one in particular — did in the first part of the 20th century.

Just play the scenario backwards and switch the characters in this obscene drama. Imagine that the American government managed to forge an international nuclear agreement with Iran. But then consider what would happen if Iran’s reaction to Trump’s presidency was to announce that the Islamic Republic would shred the agreement. The Mays and the Macrons and the Merckels would line up — perhaps even with Russia and China — alongside Trump to denounce this act of perfidy. How could Iran break so binding an international treaty, we would ask ourselves? What kind of regime runs Iran? It would almost be enough to call it a ‘terrorist regime’.

That’s why I most enjoyed Trump’s expression of love for Iranians. All US presidents say how much they love the people they are about to invade. Bush said the same about the Iraqis. So did Reagan before he bombed Gaddafi’s Libya. Now Trump feels sorry for the “long suffering Iranians”. Trump reminded us all of a time when Iran “prospered in peace” and “commanded the admiration of the world” — and no-one has spotted that he was referring to the Shah’s Iran whose Savak secret police kept Iranians in a state of permanent fear and terror through a program of obscene tortures.

-Robert Fisk
independent.co.uk