

URGENT ACTION

FOUR FAMILIES ORDERED RELEASED FROM DETENTION

On 17 August, four-year-old Carlos and 16-year-old Michael along with their mothers, Lorena and Maribel (all names changed to protect their identities), were ordered released from Berks County Residential Center in Pennsylvania by an immigration judge after nearly 700 days in detention. This follows the release of two other young boys and their mothers held in Berks for over 22 months on 7 and 14 August.

Carlos and **Lorena** fled threats, intimidation and severe and repeated gender-based violence in Honduras before arriving in the United States in October 2015. They were held at the Berks County Residential Center, a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention centre in Pennsylvania, for over 22 months. **Michael** and **Maribel** were also held there for over 22 months. They fled El Salvador in October 2015 following constant death threats to the family when Michael was targeted for gang recruitment.

Their release follows the recent releases of three-year old **Diego** and his mother **Wendy** (formerly referred to by the pseudonyms Josué and Teresa), and seven-year old **Joshua** and his mother **Maria** (formerly referred to as Antonio and Marlene), on 7 and 14 August respectively. Each of the four families is seeking asylum in the US after fleeing traumatic and life-threatening events, including kidnapping threats and severe physical and sexual violence, in their home countries of Honduras and El Salvador. All four children were granted a Special Immigrant Juvenile Visa (SIJS) in late 2016. With SIJS, a state court has determined that it is not in a child's best interest to return to his or her home country because of abuse, abandonment, or neglect by one or both parents. In this instance, it was determined that these children "were abandoned, abused, or neglected by [their] father[s]...as such, [their] mother[s] are now the custodial parent, and responsible for all decision regarding their court proceedings, custody and care." Therefore, it is essential that the mothers and children were released together. All four children have pending applications for legal permanent residency in the US. Further, their mothers have stays of removal granted while they challenge their removal orders in federal court.

Despite having sponsors to ensure their appearance at immigration hearings, their SIJ status, and pending applications for legal permanent residency, immigration officials refused to release these four children and their mothers from detention for nearly 700 days.

No further action is required of the UA network at this time. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.

This is the first update of UA 59/17. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr51/5885/2017/en/

Name: Carlos* (m), Lorena* (f), Michael* (m) and Maribel* (f) (*not their real names), and Diego (m), Wendy (f), Joshua (m) and Maria (f).
Gender m/f: all

Further information on UA: 59/17 Index: AMR 51/6963/2017 Issue Date: 18 August 2017

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