

# PRIDE

## 2019 TOOLKIT





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Dear Amnesty Activist,

Every year we join with LGBTI activists and communities around the world to celebrate Pride— and standing together for LGBTI rights is more important now than ever.

This Pride, we are again taking action to **defend transgender asylum seekers**. The Trump administration has stepped up attacks on asylum seekers at the US-Mexico border—denying their basic rights to seek asylum and to live free from violence and abuse—and transgender people are at heightened risk of violence and discrimination throughout the asylum process. **Migrant and refugee rights are LGBTI rights!**

Currently, US border authorities are systematically denying thousands of asylum seekers their human right to request asylum at the US–Mexico border. They are making asylum seekers wait for weeks or months before receiving their requests for protection. And while it is dangerous for any asylum seeker to be pushed back into the violence they face in Mexican border cities, **trans women are consistently some of those most at risk of harm**. What's more, after waiting in Mexico for weeks or months, and finally being allowed to request asylum, asylum seekers are then detained solely on the basis on their migration status, which constitutes arbitrary detention in violation of US and international law. And trans women have reported being routinely subjected to discriminatory treatment in detention. **Join us to demand the US stop the ill-treatment of trans asylum seekers.**

Additionally, since Pride 2018, Amnesty International has been campaigning to #FreeAlejandra, a trans woman asylum seeker from El Salvador in US immigration detention. **Thanks to the hard work of activists around the world, she hasn't been deported, but she's not free yet either.** Alejandra fled her home and applied for asylum in the United States in November 2017, but has since been held in detention at an ICE correctional center, despite the fact that she is not a flight risk and that the detention of asylum seekers must only be used as a last resort. **Call on ICE to demand Alejandra's release!** NO asylum seeker should be held in detention, particularly LGBTI asylum seekers, many of whom have fled unspeakable violence and persecution. ICE must release on parole all asylum seekers.

We will not stand for these injustices! Grab your Amnesty banner and this toolkit, get out to the streets, and take action!

Contact [GSI@aiusa.org](mailto:GSI@aiusa.org) for more information

# TRANS ASYLUM SEEKERS BACKGROUND

In countries all over the world, including the United States, transgender individuals continue to be discriminated against on the basis of their gender identities. Transgender individuals are subject to physical and verbal harassment and abuse, sexual violence, stigma, social exclusion, and death.

## Violence against LGBTI individuals in the Northern Triangle

The Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA), which includes Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, remains one of the most dangerous regions in the world. Violence plaguing the NTCA has led many, including many LGBTI individuals, to flee, seeking asylum elsewhere.

As Amnesty's 2017 report *No Safe Place* details, LGBTI people are particularly at risk of violence, and authorities fail to protect them. Transgender women in particular experienced death threats from gang members, sexual violence and exploitation, and human trafficking. They were subject to gender profiling, unwarranted searches, and arbitrary detention by police. The fear of reporting violence to authorities is compounded by the fear of violence and retaliation against trans women, as well as the lack of credibility of the justice system.

## Violence against transgender asylum seekers in detention

The risk to transgender individuals seeking asylum is heightened in detention centers. Transgender detainees are subject to physical, verbal and sexual violence; threats and intimidation; and misgendering. In addition, transgender individuals might not be housed in gender-appropriate cells, or subject to solitary cells against their will. As Amnesty's 2018 report *'You Don't Have Any Rights Here'* details, transgender women have been denied humanitarian parole even after being sexually assaulted in all-male detention facilities, and often lacked access to adequate healthcare even in immigration detention facilities designed for transgender women. Recent Amnesty investigations show that transgender women still face discrimination and intimidation in gender-appropriate detention.

## Seeking asylum is a human right

Seeking asylum is a human right. The asylum procedure should be fair and effective, giving people access to the [UN Refugee Agency](#) (UNHCR) upon their need or request. Migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers' rights are protected by international law, regardless of how and why they arrive in a country. They have the same rights as all other human beings, plus special protections including:

- The [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (Article 14), which states that everyone has the right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution in other countries.
- The 1951 [UN Refugee Convention](#), which protects people from being returned to countries where they risk being persecuted.
- The [1990 Migrant Workers Convention](#), which protects migrants and their families.

Transgender and all asylum seekers must be protected at all costs against non-refoulement (deporting someone to the country of origin where they face threats of violence and persecution). What's more, while seeking asylum, **detention must only be a last resort**: those seeking protection should not be held in jail.



# TRANS ASYLUM SEEKERS AT THE US-MEXICO BORDER

**“The reality is that, since we are vulnerable people, we are always in danger wherever we go.  
It’s not safe for us to be who we are.”**

Cindy, a Honduran trans woman asylum seeker in US immigration detention

US border authorities are systematically denying thousands of asylum seekers their human right to request asylum at the US–Mexico border. They are making asylum seekers wait for weeks or months before receiving their requests for protection. And while it is dangerous for any asylum seekers to be pushed back into the violence they face in Mexican border cities, trans women are consistently some of those most at risk of harm.

## **Mexico is a dangerous country for asylum seekers: Trans women are especially at risk of harm**

Several transgender women asylum seekers held in detention by the US told Amnesty International that they were often unable to stay in migrant shelters in Mexico, especially those run by churches. Even in the large caravans of asylum seekers, who were traveling together for safety, trans refugees faced discrimination and threats. When US authorities turned trans women away, they often had to sleep on the streets, or cross the border through the river, running for their lives from the dangers they face in Mexico.

Jessica, a 29-year-old woman from El Salvador, whom US authorities turned away in Tijuana, described how trans asylum seekers face discrimination by the shelters, caravans, and the police:

*We couldn’t even go to a church shelter, since we wouldn’t be welcomed for who we are... Even in the caravan we received lots of sexual harassment and ill-treatment... The Mexican police assaulted us in Mexico City, and if I were attacked by people here in Tijuana, I wouldn’t feel safe going to the police. Tijuana is a very dangerous place, and I’m afraid to go walk around in the streets by myself.*

Clarissa, a 26-year-old woman from Honduras, described the dangers she and her trans friends navigated as they joined an asylum waitlist in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico:

*When we arrived and found out we had to get on the [wait] list, we went to the Mexican officials and took a number... The shelters were not trans friendly, so we had to spend about three nights on the street, begging for food... The two days we were living on the streets, we tried to go to all five shelters, but they wouldn’t have us. That area is so violent [...] We had to be very careful walking from shelter to shelter, since there were criminals on the streets who would kidnap you.*

## **US immigration authorities arbitrarily detain and discriminate against trans women**

The US policy and practice of indefinitely detaining asylum-seekers, based solely on their migration status, constitutes arbitrary detention in violation of US and international law. There are two specialized immigration detention facilities for transgender women asylum seekers in the United States: the Cibola County Correctional Center (Milan, New Mexico); and the South Texas Detention Complex (Pearsall, Texas). Women at both facilities complained of common discrimination by US immigration officials while in detention.

Clarissa, a 26-year-old Honduran woman, was one of several women who said the discriminatory treatment re-traumatized them after years of similar abuse in their home countries they fled:

*They need to educate the officials – to not treat us discriminatorily – since we came from that hate, and the last thing we want is to experience it again.... To be treated just with dignity, because we are humans and we feel things.*

Adriana, a 20-year-old Honduran woman, said the discriminatory verbal abuse was commonplace at Pearsall:

*The hardest part was the way that all the officials treated us. Some of the officials were really mean to us... We are human beings ...they need to treat us like we are. We are women, even though we may not be so biologically. And they treated us like men. They would call us things like ‘sirs’ or ‘boys.’ They should allow an LGBT organization to come in and tell them how to treat trans people.*

Women held at Pearsall reported that a female sergeant at the facility was the most notoriously abusive and had screamed at the trans women and called them “faggots” in English.

# Stop the ill-treatment of trans asylum seekers by U.S. border and immigration officials

US border authorities are now systematically denying thousands of asylum seekers their human right to request asylum at the US–Mexico border. They are making asylum seekers wait for weeks or months before receiving their requests for protection. And while it is dangerous for *any* asylum seeker to be pushed back into the violence they face in Mexican border cities, it can be a death sentence for trans women in northern Mexico.

After waiting in Mexico for weeks or months, and finally being allowed to request asylum, the DHS practice of indefinitely detaining asylum-seekers, based solely on their migration status, constitutes arbitrary detention in violation of US and international law. Trans women asylum seekers have reported being routinely subjected to discriminatory treatment by CBP and ICE personnel, and called on DHS to implement expanded sensitivity and awareness trainings

## **We urge acting DHS Secretary Kevin K. McAleenan to:**

- Stop forcing asylum seekers to wait in Mexico before or after they request asylum at the border – it's illegal and potentially deadly.
- Grant humanitarian parole to all asylum seekers whenever possible – especially when they are LGBTI or other vulnerable groups, or have acute medical needs.
- Provide and require expanded LGBTI sensitivity and awareness trainings for all DHS personnel who come in contact with asylum seekers – especially CBP and ICE officers.

Detention of asylum seekers should only be a last resort after all other options have been exhausted. There is no reason that vulnerable trans women or others should be denied their freedom simply for seeking safety in the United States.

Name	City, State	Signature

# FREE ALEJANDRA: TRANS RIGHTS ACTIVIST SEEKING SAFETY

*As an older trans woman, and as a fighter for LGBT rights, [...] I am a fighter all the way until the last day that I am on this earth.*  
—Alejandra

## **FREE ALEJANDRA, TRANS RIGHT ACTIVIST SEEKING SAFETY**

Alejandra fought for trans rights for more than a decade in El Salvador. She was forced to flee after repeated attacks and extortion by a criminal gang, as well as abuses by the Salvadoran military. Alejandra was sexually assaulted by both the gang and military personnel because of her transgender identity.



But instead of offering her safety and a chance to rebuild her life, the U.S. government has kept Alejandra detained in a private prison. The latest appeal in her claim for asylum was denied, and, at any moment, the U.S. may deport her back to the very danger she fled from El Salvador.

Alejandra has been stuck at the Cibola detention center in New Mexico for over a year and a half. She should be free — not behind bars. Amnesty International has grave concerns about ICE's conduct in its handling of her parole requests, which have now been denied five times despite the fact that she is not a flight risk, has strong community connections in the US, and has medical needs that merit her being granted parole on humanitarian and medical grounds. Alejandra remains as other women around her are released on parole day after day. Alejandra should be free, too.

Join us in demanding that ICE release her on parole — so she can reunite with her niece, who is living in the U.S. and has already won her asylum claim.

*[If released on parole:] First I want to go run and hug my niece. We would like to live together.* —Alejandra

Alejandra's situation is not unique; there are many more trans people seeking asylum in the United States stuck waiting for months in detention centers where they are at risk of ill-treatment because of their gender identity, medical needs, or the trauma they have endured. It is cruel and unnecessary for U.S. immigration authorities to detain people fleeing to the U.S. in search of safety from persecution and violence, including women like Alejandra.

**Tell ICE to release Alejandra, along with other transgender asylum seekers detained at Cibola!**

# ICE: Free Alejandra and other trans asylum seekers

Alejandra (A# 216-269-450) is a 44-year-old transgender woman from El Salvador who requested asylum at the U.S.–Mexico border in November 2017. Since arriving at the U.S. border, she has been in immigration detention, and is currently being held by ICE at the privately operated Cibola County Correctional Center in New Mexico. Alejandra is eager to be released so she can be reunited with her niece in the U.S., who already won her asylum claim.

**We urge ICE’s Acting El Paso Field Office Director, Corey Price, to:**

- Immediately grant humanitarian parole to Alejandra while she awaits the decision on her asylum claim, including on any appeal.
- Improve the health care provided at ICE’s privately operated Cibola detention facility.
- Grant humanitarian parole to all asylum seekers whenever possible, especially when they are LGBTI or have acute medical needs.

Detention of asylum seekers should only be a last resort after all other options have been exhausted. There is no reason that people like Alejandra should be denied their freedom simply for seeking safety in the United States.

Name	City, State	Signature



# PRIDE PARADE ORGANIZING TIPS

HERE ARE JUST A FEW TIPS FOR ORGANIZING YOUR OWN EVENT OR PARTICIPATING IN AN ACTION IN YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY:

- **Make Some Noise:** If you are marching, lead the crowd in chants. Bring noise-makers, whistles and things to beat to create a little noise.
- **Visibility is Key:** Don't forget your Amnesty banner! Make some signs and march and/or setup a table with stickers, handbills, actions and other background information.
- **Grow the Movement:** The more people who become members of Amnesty International USA, the more capacity we have to educate our communities and make a change on critical human rights issue that matter. If you are tabling, ask your Regional Office for a stack of membership cards and other materials to hand out. If you're part of an Amnesty group—bring a sign-up sheet with information on when your group meets to give out to interested people.
- **Get Help Getting Started:** contact [fieldorganizingteam@aiusa.org](mailto:fieldorganizingteam@aiusa.org) to speak to a Field Organizer who can help you put together a successful action or event.
- **Be Prepared:** Wear sunscreen, bring water and wear comfortable shoes.
- **Keep it Short and Simple:** If you are collecting signatures on petitions you will need to get your pitch down to a short conversation. Often, working the crowd before a march is the best time to get people interested!
- **Walk Around to Increase Your Impact:** take your clipboard & petitions & walk around the festival to ask for signatures— don't assume people will come to you!



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