

URGENT ACTION

FOUR OF FIVE FAMILIES FREED FROM DETENTION

Over the course of 2020, Amnesty International campaigned to free five families from immigration detention in the USA, with the broader call for all detained families to be freed. Of these five, four were released, and one was deported to their country of origin. As dozens of families remain detained and could be at risk of deportation, we will continue to monitor the situation and disseminate new actions – if and when needed.

NO FURTHER ACTION IS REQUESTED. MANY THANKS TO ALL WHO SENT APPEALS.

US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detained dozens of families at three facilities – the South Texas Family Residential Center (Dilley) in Texas, the Karnes Family Residential Center in Texas, and the Berks County Family Residential Center in Pennsylvania – simply because they traveled to the United States seeking safety.

Thanks to the relentless advocacy of their attorneys and support from Amnesty activists around the world, ICE released Juana* (45) and Norma* (4) from Honduras, Paola (20) and Jose (1) from Guatemala, Marilyn (31) and Yunior (11) from Honduras, and Karla (43) and Katherin (15) from Honduras. While detained in Dilley, the health and wellness of these children and parents deteriorated and they were at risk of contracting COVID-19. Now free, they are able to pursue their claims for asylum in safety. However, ICE deported Ana* (22) and Victoria* (4) to Honduras after spending over one year locked up in the same facility.

Authorities confirmed an outbreak of COVID-19 in family detention centers in June 2020, placing all detained families at grave risk due to inadequate hygiene and negligent medical care. A federal judge described the facilities as “on fire” after this confirmation and because of inadequate protective measures. Yet, families continued to be needlessly detained. Families trapped in detention feel they will get COVID-19 at any minute. Immigration authorities at ICE have the legal authority to release families together and has historically done so but under the prior USA administration was largely choosing not to exercise its authority.

The new president of the USA has begun taking steps to roll back some of the most egregious policies of the Trump administration but has yet to make concrete commitments to reform the immigration detention system. Under the new administration, many families in prolonged detention were released, but other families have been put into detention. We will keep our call for the release of all detained families and the end of the family detention system. Families should not be separated and must not be deported back to danger. They must be allowed their right to ask for asylum. Families have communities waiting to welcome them, and there is no reason — especially during a pandemic — not to release them.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Families in ICE detention (They/them)

THIS IS THE SIXTH AND FINAL OUTPUT FOR UA 116/20

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr51/3414/2020/en/>