



Assistance to Immigrants in Detention

THE INSIDE VIEW

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Vol 14

The First 100 Days

In the first 100 days of the Trump administration, we have felt the whiplash of legislation and executive orders that have held devastating impacts for our immigrant neighbors. Below are just a number of the changes made by the administration. From [Global Refuge](#) and [AP News](#):

- Refugee resettlement has essentially come to a halt
 - Refugees who were fully vetted and ready to come to the US had their flights canceled, leaving them vulnerable and those who were ready to welcome them demoralized.
- Additional pathways for asylum have been dismantled
 - Seeking asylum is a legal right – but now there is essentially no avenue to do so for families who have fled war, violence, and persecution in hopes of finding safety on US soil.
- “Protected areas” are no longer protected
 - Immigration officials can now arrest people in houses of worship, courts, schools, and hospitals. Many families are afraid to pray, seek medical attention, walk their children to school, and more.
- Family detention has returned
 - Children and families are being locked up in detention centers with no sense of when they will be released.
- Due process is under threat
 - People with no criminal record are being deported to foreign prisons under the Alien Enemies Act—the same policy responsible for Japanese internment camps during World War II.
- Children must now represent themselves in court
 - Unaccompanied children as young as 3 or 4-years-old, many of whom have experienced significant trauma in their journeys to the United States, are left to defend themselves in immigration court without a lawyer or legal advocate.
- There is an effort to end birthright citizenship
 - The administration has attempted to end birthright citizenship—a constitutional right—via executive order.
- Homeland Security closed the Office of the Immigration Detention Ombudsman
 - The department was an independent office within Homeland Security — not connected to either Immigration and Customs Enforcement or Customs and Border Protection. Its job was to make sure immigration detention facilities are safe and humane.

We are grateful that there are a large number of cases challenging and seeking to undue some of the harm caused by the actions of the administration’s first 100 days. At the same time, we cannot ignore the vast impacts that have already occurred and the ripple effects that will continue to spread. Our voices have power and weight; as the next part of our newsletter highlights, we must continue to speak up and speak out about the injustices occurring in front of our eyes.

Speaking Out for Those Who Cannot Speak

Brian Bither, Pastor of Shalom Mennonite Church and volunteer with Indiana AID, recently wrote this call to action for his church's newsletter. Though Indiana AID is not a faith-based group, his words resonate with our work and he graciously gave permission for it to be shared with Indiana AID's readers.

“Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute.

Speak out; judge righteously; defend the rights of the poor and needy.” – Proverbs 31:8-9

Nearly a month ago, President Trump invoked a 1798 wartime law, the Alien Enemies Act, in order to ramp up his efforts to expel immigrants from the United States. He then announced that he had made arrangements with the President of El Salvador to send immigrants (who would now be labeled as ‘enemies of the state’ under this new act) to a mega-prison in that country known as CECOT, which can hold up to 40,000 inmates. Just a few months earlier, the International Security Journal included this prison in a list of the 20 worst prisons in the world and ranked it as the third worst overall. There, the detainees are not granted any rights. They are not guaranteed food, medicine, or sufficient clothing or shelter. They are not protected from abuse, allowed to receive any visitors, or even permitted to go outside. And they are prisoners for life. The prison does not exist to rehabilitate offenders but to punish criminals (and political enemies) and to enrich the state of El Salvador through the slave labor that it extracts from the people condemned to live there. This prison is comparable to the gulags of the Soviet Union and commits almost every imaginable human rights violation. And now our government is sending human beings directly there.

There are few situations in which I am willing to point to a specific law or public policy and judge it to be good or evil in moral terms, but this is one case in which that must be said. Sending people to CECOT is evil. If you’re reading this newsletter, then you likely could have guessed that this would be my position, and I doubt that I have to say much more to convince you of that. So, the question is, what are we who are citizens of the government committing these acts, as well as followers of Jesus, obliged to do about it?

The Bible gives a pretty straightforward answer: speak out about against it. If we are in a position in which we ‘can’ speak, then the love of neighbor demands that we raise up our voice against evil. To be clear, speaking “out” does not mean expressing our concerns to likeminded friends, as I am doing in this reflection. There may be some value in that, but it is not incumbent upon all of us, and there are times when it can even be counterproductive. Speaking out means – as the Quakers put it – speaking truth to power. Emailing, calling or writing to people to whom we have been given access to clearly decry this action, just as we would do if it were our own family members who were caught up in it. This is uncomfortable because it involves confrontation. It may seem futile because we may believe – rightly or wrongly – that our words will have no impact. But that is what God calls on us to do: to proclaim the truth, not to control the outcome. So, I would urge all of us who do not feel that we ourselves are among ‘the destitute’ to find a way that works for us to ask our representatives to stop. Better yet, we should find a way to turn this into a spiritual discipline, to train our voices to rise to the occasion.

~ Brian

Pedro's Experience

Thank you for taking the time and allowing me the opportunity to be able to share my story. I was born in Mexico but I arrived to the USA in 2003. I am currently 27 years old; I was 4 years old when I arrived in January of that year. All of my childhood, teenage years, and large part of my adulthood I have been in the country. I went through kindergarten all the way to finishing high school. I was able to obtain DACA and I had legal status in the country, but unfortunately I let my DACA expire because at that time in 2020, the COVID pandemic was happening and I also went through a divorce that took most of my financial resources. I lost the apartment where I'd been living and the car I had, as well as my DACA status.

When I was picked up by officials from Homeland Security outside of my work, they did not explain why I was being detained. When I got to the makeshift station in Chicago, they told me that the reason I was detained was due to a crime that I had committed in 2020.

In that location, other detainees told me that the officials who detained them violated the law by entering their homes without a judicial warrant - for one of them, they broke out the windows of his car and pulled him out of the vehicle. From Broadview, Illinois, they transported us to the Clay County jail in two paddy wagons because we were 21 detainees they were moving. We were handcuffed, hands and feet, for the full 5 hours of the trip. When we arrived at the jail, they put us in a holding cell that had a maximum capacity of 8 people. 21 of us detainees had to sleep in there that night, however we could because there was no space - we slept head to foot, and one of the detainees had to sleep standing up in the open shower. All of us had our rights violated, as at the same time the officials used discriminatory, anti-immigrant laws against us; many of us were arrested solely for the color of our skin, solely for having brown skin.

Many of us have spent a long time in this country without getting in trouble, and actually, many of us have decent jobs and we contributed to our communities and society. In my case, I worked in an office of a customs broker in Chicago and we collaborated with Customs and Border Patrol.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share my story and part of what I've heard and seen from other detainees who are now deported and who could share their stories before being deported.

Sincerely,
Pedro F. Arenas Duran



(Artwork by a talented
detained partner)

Contact Us

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Volunteer

Currently, our greatest needs are for...

- Spanish-speaking visitation partners
- Visitation partners who speak languages other than English and Spanish
- Volunteer coordination experience
- Financial support/fundraising experience
- Social media support and data input

Donate



<https://www.indianaaid.org/donate>

- Indiana AID is a volunteer group funded 100% on donations. Please consider a tax-deductible donation via the QR code or link above.
- Shalom Mennonite Church is our fiscal sponsor - you will be taken to their site's giving page where you will first select an amount to give and then choose the fund where you would like your money to go, "Indiana AID Fund." None of the money donated to Indiana AID goes to the church's budget.
- You can also donate by sending a check to the church with "**Indiana AID**" in the memo line.
 - **Shalom Mennonite Church**
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