



national network for immigrant and refugee rights

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100 STORIES PROJECT

HURRICANE: Human Rights Immigrant Community Action Network
An initiative of the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

“Getting here was so hard for me- I suffered very much... We would be okay with leaving, but not this way. Since we cannot work, there is nothing we can do. I feel so anxious my body hurts all over. My brother is detained and I cannot help him. I have a small child in Guatemala who depends on me and I haven’t been able to send money for two months. The days are long when you are not working. I just arrived [to the U.S.] recently and worked hard to pay off the money I owe from the trip; now I worry about how I will repay it. I am so afraid I cannot sleep. I keep thinking, what if immigration comes?”—Former employee at AgriProcessor’s, Inc placed on house arrest after ICE raided her workplace¹

May 12, 2008-- Postville, Iowa

ICE arrests Indigenous people in raid at AgriProcessor’s Inc, tearing families and communities apart

Over 900 ICE armed agents raided Agriprocessor’s Inc, the nation’s largest kosher slaughterhouse and meat packing plant, arresting and detaining 390 immigrant workers, who were mostly Indigenous people from Guatemala and Mexico, many of them women with young children. 57 women and 12 underage youth were placed on house arrest and forced to wear electronic monitoring ankle bracelets. Many were directly turned over for deportation While only five had a prior criminal record, all were detained and many were immediately deported.

Detainees were rushed into a plea agreement without adequate consultation on the immigration consequences, and immigration lawyers were denied access to these criminal proceedings. Within 2 weeks, 307 people had been charged with aggravated felonies, which affect their chances of ever adjusting status in the U.S., many of them with US citizen spouses and children, having resided here for 15 or more years.

To abridge *habeas corpus*, which gives the courts 72 hours to charge the detainees or release them, and in this case deport them, court interpreters and attorneys were paid overtime to process all the detainees within the 72-hour timeframe.

During interviews with court appointed criminal attorneys, detainees were essentially coerced into signing a plea agreement offer, which came directly from the US Department of Justice and could not be altered. Workers who had used a social security number that belonged to someone were advised to plead guilty to “aggravated identity theft” and those who used a social security number that simply did not exist in the system, were forced to plea guilty to “social security fraud,” both felonies.

Six months later, nearly 300 families had one or more family members in federal detention awaiting deportation since the ICE raid. About forty women remained on house arrest, forced to wear an ankle shackle monitoring and restricting their every movement, while they cared for young children and struggled to put food on the table. Women and their children continued to struggle with severe emotional and psychological trauma as a direct result of the ICE raids, including recurring nightmares and insomnia, depression, anxiety, and stress-related symptoms: body pains, headaches, indigestion, hair loss. Many children experienced abandonment anxiety and fear of separation from their mother; others displayed aggressive behavior such as hitting and pushing other children.

The raid was not only traumatic for the families directly affected, but also for residents of the town who heard about the raid and ran to the parish church for asylum, spending several days sleeping there in fear that ICE would raid their homes and separate them from their families.

For similar stories of abuses and rights violations during ICE raids, see NNIRR 2008 Chronology of Abuses at www.nnirr.org.

Sources:

1. In-person interviews with affected families by Virginia Gibbs, Professor at Luther College, Member of Postville Relief Effort (Postville, Iowa, June 30-July 30, 2008).
2. *Des Moines Register*, “Update: Hundreds of arrests predicted at Iowa ICE raid,” by Nigel Duara and William Petroski, May 12, 2008.
3. “Interpreting after the largest ICE raid in US history: a personal account,” by Erik Camayd-Freixas, Florida International University, June 13, 2008. www.graphics8.nytimes.com/images/2008/07/14/opinion/14ed-camayd.pdf
4. *New York Times*, “Hundreds are arrested in US sweep of meat plant,” by Susan Saulny, May 13, 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/13/us/13immig.html> (accessed June 3, 2008).
5. NNIRR telephone interview with community organizer, Amalia Anderson and Pastor David Vasquez (October 5, 2008).