

**New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice**

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July 28, 2009

Secretary Janet Napolitano  
Department of Homeland Security  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Napolitano:

We write to call your attention to an urgent human rights crisis, and ask that you immediately allow a national delegation representing detention advocates from across the country to visit the South Louisiana Correctional facility. Over the past one month this center has become a symbol of all of our national concerns about ICE's widespread failure to ensure its facilities, particularly local jails housing immigrants as part of intergovernmental service agreements – meet ICE's own minimum detention standards.

Yesterday, detainees launched the fifth hunger strike in the last few months, risking their own health to call attention to ICE's violation of its own minimum standards and to demand permanent improvements.

The testimonies and actions of these detainees contradict your claims that the current inspections and monitoring systems “provide adequately for both quality control and accountability.” As national advocates deeply concerned with your refusal this week to acknowledge the need for legally enforceable standards for immigration detention, we believe that these detainees and their complaints must be heard.

In the past month, over 100 detainees from over 10 countries have served as human rights monitors exposing inhumane conditions at the facility. Not only have a large number of detainees filed grievances and requested meetings with jail and ICE staff, detainees have launched four hunger strikes to obtain basic necessities like soap, toilet paper, communication with their families, and information about their legal cases. In the face of this human rights work and peaceful action, ICE and jail staff have responded with aggressive disciplinary action including blocking detainees' access to legal representatives.

As national organizations concerned with the increased detention of immigrants in dehumanizing conditions, we stand with these workers in their demands for humane detention conditions and a just immigration system in the United States. We join the detainees in their reasonable requests, and we ask that you immediately permit a national delegation consisting of advocates, religious, and political experts on U.S. detention

standards to speak to detainees immediately and directly so that the truth about what is happening in the detention center is not suppressed.

Human rights monitoring reports prepared by detainees at the South Louisiana Correctional Center in Basile Louisiana with the support of the New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice expose serious and consistent violations of ICE's 2000 Detention Standards applicable to facilities housing ICE detainees pursuant to Intergovernmental Service Agreements. These facilities are sometimes permitted to adopt, adapt, or establish alternatives to the minimum standards provided they meet or exceed the objective represented by the standard. Reports reveal violations of ICE's own minimum standards in the following areas:

- Visitation
- Recreation
- Telephone Access
- Access to Legal Materials
- Correspondence and Other Mail
- Food Service
- Issuance and Exchange of Clothing, Bedding and Towels
- Hunger Strikes
- Medical Care
- Administrative and Disciplinary Segregation: Special Management Units
- Disciplinary Policy
- Detainee Grievance Procedures

Furthermore, when detainees working as human rights monitors have offered complaints or grievances, they have been dismissed, rebuked, and often faced pressure, threats, and retaliation, including disciplinary segregation. The facility has unilaterally blocked access to written materials, phone calls, and visits by their legal representatives and interrogated detainees about their human rights monitoring, pressuring them to renounce their investigative work.

The detainees have nonetheless persevered, providing firsthand accounts of how ICE's failure to meet its own minimum standards harms their physical and mental well being. They have continued their human rights monitoring and investigation, even under immense pressure, because they don't want their families and communities to suffer in the same way.

We commend detainees for their bravery, offer our organizational support of their hunger strike, and urge ICE to immediately grant the following reasonable requests:

- Allow a national delegation of political, religious, and detainee rights advocates to meet with detainees immediately and tour the facility in the next two weeks;
- Release detainees serving as human rights monitors from solitary confinement and cease all retaliation against detainees for reporting inhumane detention standards;

- Immediately improve conditions for detainees at the facility;
- Publicly release plans to ensure detention center operates according to standards as long as detainees are held there;
- Release documents about the Basile facility requested by detainees and their advocates so that they can perform an external review of its conditions; and
- Cancel ICE's contract with the Basile detention facility if ICE does not remedy violations raised by detainee human rights monitors and publish a monitoring plan that reasonably ensures ongoing compliance in the next one month.

Sincerely,

Saket Soni  
Executive Director  
New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice

**ORGANIZATIONS SIGNING IN SUPPORT:**

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) – Immigrant Rights Project

Center for Constitutional Rights

National Day Laborer Organizing Network

National Immigration Law Center

National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild

Southern Center for Human Rights

cc: Dora Schriro, Special Advisor on Immigration and Customs Enforcement and  
Detention and Removal

Phillip Miller, Acting Field Office Director, New Orleans, Louisiana