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On Immigration Detention - Hearings Are Needed, But Congress Must Stop Expanding This Abusive System

Link: <http://bit.ly/IICDetentionHearing>

Washington, DC - "Forty years ago, this system did not exist." That's the starting point of a new exposé on the rise (and rise) of civil immigration detention in the United States, published by The Guardian and the Marshall Project. Their deep analysis comes just ahead of a vital congressional hearing on "The Expansion and Troubling Use of ICE Detention," taking place Thursday in the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship.

This system incarcerates asylum seekers, legal immigrants, and people who have lived here for decades. It takes moms and dads from their kids and good people away from their homes, jobs, and communities. Under President Trump it has bloated to the largest ever--more than 52,000 people detained for civil immigration reasons today--but there is bipartisan shame to go around.

U.S. tax dollars have fed and enriched a whole new industry of private prisons. The Guardian/Marshall Project study explains: "Over the last four decades, a series of emergency stopgaps and bipartisan deals has created a new multibillion-dollar industry built on the incarceration of immigrants."

"Hearings are needed. Continuous exposure of this administration's treatment of refugees, migrants, and families is needed. But what is also needed is for Congress to stop funding the unchecked expansion of an unaccountable, abusive system," said **Hannah Graf Evans, Legislative Representative, Immigration & Refugee Policy, Friends Committee on National Legislation.**

Also this week, two House subcommittees held a much-needed hearing on the administration's refugee and Muslim bans. And twenty-two Conference Ministers with the United Church of Christ came to Washington, DC to "lift a single prophetic voice for the first time in recent memory by advocating directly with members of Congress and speaking outside the U.S. Capitol."

Rev. Justo González II, Illinois Conference intentional interim conference minister said: "We speak for justice for immigrants, against the violation of human dignity and 'hell no' to kidnapping children from their parents. The forced separation of families and cages are un-American and will not be tolerated. Our children matter. They are not animals to be locked up in cages."

Edith Guffey, Kansas-Oklahoma Conference Minister, said she simply had to be part of this effort. "Only we know when we reach the point that something that has been comfortable for us becomes so uncomfortable it simply has to change -- when what has been really can't be any longer. On this one for me, the sidelines aren't good enough. It's time for me to step outside my comfort zone," she said.

Rev. Shari Prestemon of Minnesota explained: "I think there's a consensus that immigration justice is a critical issue in this moment of our nation's history that has deep moral implications. It is also an issue that our sacred texts have a lot to say about, and thus we as Church must be bold enough to step into the public square and speak clearly with one voice."

Faith leaders of other organizations are also raising their voices. Said **Sister Simone Campbell, SSS, Executive Director of NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice**: "I weep at what President Trump's inhumane policies have done in our names. Men, women, and children come to our country and ask us for protection. Instead, we rig the system against them and throw them in cages. We keep them locked up indefinitely to kill their spirits and hope they will give up their search for safety. What a cruel, sad policy for a land that once claimed to stand for freedom and opportunity. But hope is not lost! Congress can change this and create an immigration system that respects the dignity of all people."

Sr. Marie Lucey, OSF, Associate Director of Franciscan Action Network offered: "This nation of immigrants, as we sometimes call ourselves with pride, is failing today's asylum seekers and legal immigrants. In our name this administration detains children and families, and uses tax dollars to build an unnecessary wall and fund private prisons. As people of faith we decry this assault on brothers and sisters in our human family. As U.S. citizens, we are outraged that our home is no longer seen as a welcoming place for those seeking safety from violence and opportunity for their children."

Rev. John L. McCullough, CWS President and CEO, said: "We demand that Congress stop the administration's intentionally deadly anti-asylum and anti-immigrant policies. Stop turning away asylum seekers. Stop separating families. Stop detaining children. Stop militarizing the border. We need policies that affirm each person's humanity and treat all children the way we would treat our own and not leave them to die in the desert or force them to risk their lives in the river. In this moment, we will be judged by how we treat migrants at our doorstep. I pray we choose life over death."

Susan Gunn, Director of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, said: "Maryknoll missionaries join Pope Francis in expressing our solidarity with migrants around the world: Welcoming others means welcoming God in person. We believe that in the process of enforcing immigration laws, the U.S. government must protect the human rights and dignity of all migrants, with particular consideration for those most vulnerable -- refugees, asylum seekers, and children. We call on Congress to work to end the cruel and inhumane practice of immigration detention and advance humane alternatives to detention, particularly community-based alternatives based on a case management model."

And **Rabbi Josh Lesser, President Bridges Faith Initiative**, stated: "Our tradition mandates that we must not stand idly by in the face of injustice. When children are detained, when human beings are detained it requires a response. We must not stay silent when these detentions

unjustly tear apart the fabric of our society. We demand that Congress stop the administration's intentionally anti-immigrant policies that is shredding our American values of welcome and due process."

Read the **letter from over thirty national, faith-based organizations calling for a reduction in "the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) budget for deportation, detention, and border militarization."** Instead, they urge support for programs that include "community-based alternatives to detention, mitigation of the root causes of forced migration, and meaningful reforms that would reunite families permanently and allow our communities to flourish."

Alternatives to detention are cost-effective, practical, and humane; read about them [here](#).

The Interfaith Immigration Coalition is made up of 53 national, faith-based organizations brought together across many theological traditions with a common call to seek just policies that lift up the God-given dignity of every individual. In partnership, we work to protect the rights, dignity, and safety of all refugees and migrants.

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