

Report exposes deaths in US immigrant detention centers

By Khara Sikhan
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At least 31 migrants have died in US immigration detention centers since 2012. Recently released case reviews from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) on 18 of those deaths show a clear pattern of abusive treatment and substandard medical care. According to an independent report by Human Rights Watch (HRW), 16 of the reviews showed “evidence of substandard medical practices.”

The immigration detention procedures documented by HRW are easily comparable in their brutality to those of a criminal detention center. The correctional officers ignore patient complaints of pain and discomfort, and the medical staff ignore basic procedures. Those interned are treated as criminals instead of refugees fleeing drug cartels, state repression, and bitter poverty in their home country.

Migrants held in US detention centers face weeks and months of fear, despair, and outright cruelty. They are effectively forced to withhold their true medical history and avoid complaints about their conditions, from fear of facing retaliation from immigration officers in the form of sped-up deportation or exorbitant medical bills.

The investigation reports read similarly in their brutal treatment of detainees. Manuel Cota-Domingo entered the United States from Guatemala on December 8, 2013, and was captured by US Border Patrol. Cota-Domingo had blister packets of medicine identified as diabetes medicine, which were taken away from him. The detention center ignored basic medical procedures as well as clear symptoms of medical issues. Within 15 days, on December 23, Cota-Domingo succumbed to diabetic ketoacidosis and pneumonia, and died at the age of 34.

Clemente Mponda entered the United States from Mozambique on a student visa. Mponda had a history of depression and exhibited paranoid thoughts to nurses

when turned over to ICE. He was placed repeatedly in segregation, sometimes as punitive action, even with the warnings of poor mental health. Mponda threatened to commit suicide if he was not released, and after 15 months in detention, Mponda was found dead at 27 as a result of toxic overdose of mental health medication.

Responsibility for the conditions in immigration detention centers lies squarely with the Obama administration. Its draconian immigration “reform” policies resulted in a record-setting 1.5 million deportations during his first term alone. By 2013, the Obama administration was deporting 1,000 people per day. Today, his administration has deported over 2.5 million people, a record above all of the deportations of the 20th century combined.

There are about 11 million undocumented people living in the United States, and 71 percent are from Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Mexico. These refugees are driven to the United States by the conditions in their home countries, which are devastated by US-backed austerity, the international drug trade and exploitation by major corporations, allowing rampant violence and unending poverty to grip their societies.

In 2009, the Obama administration backed a coup d’etat against Honduran leader Manuel Zelaya, after Zelaya proposed small increases in Honduras’s minimum wage. In 2010, Obama signed into legislation a \$600 million bill to militarize the US-Mexico border. The bill included the use of predator drones, and thousands more border patrol agents.

Since 2014, migration from Central America has surged amid increasing violence. The Obama administration has responded by increasing spending on border surveillance, capture and detention, particularly of children who were traveling alone.

In 2014, Obama endorsed the Southern Border Program created by Mexican President Peña Nieto, which set up an operation to capture migrants traveling through northern Mexico from Central America and torture, beat, extort, kidnap, and kill them. The Obama administration has given over \$3 billion to arm and militarize Mexican security forces against these migrants.

Hillary Clinton was a central figure overseeing these mass deportation policies, as Obama's secretary of state. The Clinton Presidential campaign postures as pro-immigrant, but Clinton's record shows her support and participation in the policies of mass deportation, including the deportation of children, and increased militarization of border patrol. The records of Obama and Clinton are clear signs that the Democratic Party is not a "lesser evil" when compared to the same noxious nationalism of Donald Trump.

The conditions and trials of the refugees entering the United States are virtually blacked out from media coverage and concealed from public scrutiny. The plight of the migrants, held in inhumane and squalid conditions inside the most advanced capitalist economy in the world, is a damning indictment of the present political and economic setup, which is characterized by the complete subservience of both big business parties to the profit interests of the financial elite.

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