

“On top of taking my family, they are branded as criminals”

## Video of Border Patrol agents dragging mother away from children sparks outrage

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A video of border Patrol agents dragging a woman into a van as her three traumatized daughters scream and cry for their mother has gone viral on social media. Last Saturday, 36-year-old Perla Morales Luna stepped out to pay her rent in National City, a suburb of San Diego, California. She was accompanied by her three daughters one of whom is believed to be a minor. Still close to her house, she was grabbed by two plainclothes men and one uniformed Border Patrol agent, and hustled off to a Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) van.

Cell phone video footage shows the agents ripping Morales Luna from the hands of her children as they scream and wail, while in the background the officers can be heard demanding that she “Get in the car.” As the car is seen leaving, one of the daughters can heard asking where her mother was being taken.

The video has been viewed over 10 million times after being shared on social media by Judith Castro-Gonzalez, a teacher for one of Morales Luna’s children.

Explaining why she shared the video, Castro told NBC7 that she could not believe that a mother could be dragged away from her children in that manner, and was horrified at the injustice: “Honestly I couldn’t watch the whole thing...Just seeing a mom being approached by agents who are dressed in civilian clothing, with no badges to be seen, and just literally dragging the mom away into the border patrol truck.”

As Pedro Rios, director of the American Friends Service Committee in San Diego told the *Washington Post*, “If there weren’t uniformed agents, it would resemble a kidnapping.”

In a tweet released after the arrest, CBP declared that Morales Luna, who was in the United States without the required documents, was arrested in “a targeted operation,” since she had been identified as an “organizer

for a transnational criminal smuggling organization operating in East County, San Diego.”

When asked whether she would be charged with any smuggling-related crime (whether drugs, humans or something else altogether), CBP merely responded by saying Morales Luna was “in the country illegally, which is also a crime.” As of Friday, no charges had been filed against her in any federal court.

A rally press conference was held Friday by community and family members to demand the return of Morales Luna and draw the connections between the Border Patrol’s accusations and those that had been leveled against Francisco Duarte and Rosenda Perez last May when they were abducted by ICE agents outside their home in National City, leaving their four children behind.

WSWS reporters spoke to 20-year-old Francisco Duarte, Jr., who reported that during the abduction of his parents last year “[The ICE agents] asked me, ‘Okay, who here is over 18 years old?’ I told them that I was. All they said was ‘Okay, now you have to take care of the family.’ It was completely unimaginable... I had to stop my studies and go to work full time...The same language that they used to slander my parents they used to slander this woman, that they were involved with some sort of smuggling operation. On top of destroying families, they want to try to portray us as criminals...I don’t think the government would listen [to a proposal to reform immigration policy]. They listen to rich people, the people that have the money.”

Speaking to the crowd at yesterday’s rally, Duarte, Jr. pointed out that it was only after the video went viral that accusations began. “As soon as our story gets out there, now they are saying my dad is involved in smuggling organization and my mom is part of it to. My dad is an ice cream man since he came to this country... and they say

he's involved in a criminal people smuggling organization...the exact same statement they put out for [Morales Luna] is what they put out for my dad and my mom, and it turned out to not be true...On top of taking my family they are branded as criminals."

Castro-Gonzalez, the teacher who shared the viral video, spoke at the rally about similar experiences when her parents were deported, "I myself experienced that. I didn't see my parents get taken away like these girls did. But my parents were deported. I was only 15 years old and did any care? 'What is wrong with these kids?! Do they have food?! Do they have somewhere to live?! Do they have someone to take care of them?!'...This is not a cry to just point out what is being done to Latinos it is not only affecting us. We need to stand up against injustice...not just about immigration."

The case was made throughout the press conference that immigration enforcement agencies are developing a modus operandi where they detain undocumented immigrants and for public consumption fabricate claims about supposed involvement with human trafficking, although they of course present no such charges formally.

Francisco Duarte, Sr. told WWSW reporters, "I want for the nightmare that I lived through not to happen to other people. I don't want other people to go through the same thing, so that's why we're to show our support."

"I was detained for seven months and was released on December 22nd, and I've been without work since then because my permit to work hasn't gone through yet—supposedly it takes four months to go through the process. So right now I'm not receiving any support outside of what my family can send from Mexico, and what my son is bringing in right now that he's working. The whole thing has been a nightmare."

Andres Moreno II, the attorney representing Morales Luna told the press conference, "I want to address the ICE statement yesterday in regard to their claim that she was involved in some kind of immigrant smuggling organization. I talked to my client about that, she has no idea what they're talking about. We don't have any information at all that she's ever been arrested for any of those allegations that she's charged with. At this point we're trying to get information from Border Patrol and ICE as to why they're making these claims.

"I can say she's been here since she was 15 years old. She's got three United States citizen children. As far as we can tell—we've checked all the court records—we don't see any criminal charges filed against her in any capacity. She has never been arrested for anything as far

as we can tell, so we're at a bit of a loss as to why they're alleging her in involvement in a smuggling ring."

Mark Lane an organizer of the press conference and community activist noted, "She was arrested for being undocumented, [Border Patrol's] statement clearly said that. First they sensationalize it with a beautiful salacious statement and then when you ask them to expand on that they say 'We can't, it's an ongoing investigation.' It's out there in public and she's been smeared. She has not been arrested on any criminal charges."

The tactics used by the CBP—whether it is the brutal separation of parents from children, or smear campaigns, particularly the unsubstantiated and unclear charges of "smuggling" leveled against undocumented migrants—have become routine in the ramped up anti-immigrant drive of the Trump administration.

National City, with a mostly Latino and working-class population, has not as of yet proclaimed itself to be a "sanctuary city." However, in June 2017, the Democratic Party-dominated City Council unanimously passed an empty resolution declaring that National City was a "compassionate community" committed to ensuring that residents can access services regardless of immigration status.

The 2017 resolution expressed support for the California legislature's "Sanctuary State" bill and prohibited city police from involving themselves in immigration enforcement. As the recent incident shows, such resolutions—even if they are unanimous—are not only toothless, but work to cover up the collusion of the Democratic Party in facilitating deportations and other anti-immigrant measures.

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