

Unaccompanied immigrant children sent to New York are “disappeared” by ICE

By Steve Light
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Reports from New York City reveal the Trump administration and its Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) thugs are continuing their attacks on immigrant refugee children. The victims include youth who reached the United States unaccompanied by their parents, as well as children separated from their parents by the US government.

NY1 has posted video of children, sent almost 2,000 miles from the Texas border to New York City, being led in the dead of night through East Harlem streets to the Cayuga Center that arranges foster care. This was followed by a report revealing that 466 students from New York City and surrounding counties, who were no longer showing up at their schools between last October and March, had in fact been taken into custody by ICE agents, but the federal government was not reporting this to the schools or to city or state agencies.

Late on June 25, a federal judge in San Diego, Dana Sabraw, ordered the government to reunite all children who had been separated from their parents while in ICE detention. However, the injunction resulting from the case brought by the ACLU, acting for separated families, allows the government two weeks before the reunification of children under five must take place, and 30 days before reunification for older children.

An attorney for the Justice Department argued that federal agencies should be given time since the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) sometimes does not always know when a parent has been released. Judge Sabraw said he “was not seeking to interfere with the government’s authority to enforce criminal and immigration laws,” according to the *Wall Street Journal*.

New York’s Mayor Bill de Blasio and Governor Andrew Cuomo confirmed on June 20 that they did not know how many children were sent to New York or

where they were being housed, according *Daily News*. The New York consulates for Honduras and El Salvador also said they did not know how many of their child citizens were involved or how to reach their relatives. “The children included a 9-year-old boy from Honduras who had come alone on a bus from Texas, and a child as young as 9 months old,” the mayor said.

The concurrent revelation of the ICE arrest in the New York area of “unaccompanied minors,” who had already been under the supervision of the ORR, only became public knowledge by coincidence. According to the Commissioner of the Mayor’s Office of Immigration Affairs, Bitta Mostofi, “Some sort of initial awareness to us that this was happening was because we were notified by schools, because kids didn’t show up to schools the next day,” the *Daily News* reported.

These were children who had made the treacherous crossing into the US unaccompanied and were detained and then sent to New York City to be held with other children in foster-care type detention facilities run by ORR, an agency within the Department of Health and Human Services, until relatives believed to be in the area are found to act as sponsors.

Explaining the significance of ICE, an agency within the Department of Homeland Security, taking custody, Eve Stotland, Director of Legal Services at The Door community service centers, said, “A young person is in something that looks like foster care one day and then the next day they’re in something that looks like prison, with adults.”

Many were detained by ICE merely because they turned 18. In other cases, they may have been released by ORR to a sponsor but re-arrested by ICE, often on vague allegations of gang connections, members of the Legal Aid Society told the *Daily News*, even though the

children may have fled to the US to escape violence by MS-13. In other words, their “association” with the gangs impels them to flee, and then subjects them to imprisonment once detained in the United States.

Such circumstances make it even more difficult for parents and children to be able to locate each other. The *Washington Post* reported “bureaucratic errors that leave government officials unaware whether a child was separated from their family or had arrived at the border by themselves.” Only two children of 300 families represented by the Texas Civil Rights Project have been tracked down.

Identification numbers began to be given to families more than a week ago, according to *USA Today*, but social media comments pointed out that photos of children with numbers on their sleeves emphasized the parallel to prisons, and even to the numbering of Nazi concentration camp prisoners. However, since there was no system for tracking parents and children before that, government databases may not be able to link families.

The horrendous toll of these inhumane policies is seen in an account on WNYC News, in which Dr. Michael Katz, CEO of New York City Health and Hospital, reported that eight immigrant children were brought by their government-appointed guardians to North Central Bronx Hospital and another four were brought to Bellevue Hospital. Dr. Ruth Gerson of Bellevue stated that at least one child was suicidal and others had been injuring themselves, with apparent psychotic symptoms, hearing voices and seeing things found to be related to the separation from their parents. The guardians do not, of course, know the children’s medical histories. The psychiatrists feel helpless as “good treatment really should be about giving them treatment within the context of putting their family back together.”

The children who in many cases are being lost track of would be more correctly termed “disappeared,” as was the practice of the military regimes in Chile and Argentina in regard to political prisoners. That is in fact the proper term for these immigrants, jailed for seeking asylum in the United States, and doubly punished by having their children removed.

Even if children are no longer taken from parents, ICE raids and deportations are continuing to take parents from children, including those born as citizens

in the US. As of May, there was a backlog of more than 700,000 cases in federal immigration courts. Cases of detained families could take months or years to be heard. Meanwhile, the US military has been put on notice to build detention/concentration camps for 120,000 immigrants.

Using alleged danger from the protests against the anti-immigrant policies and family separations as an excuse, ICE announced that in New York City it would not hold in-person hearings in court for detained immigrants for the foreseeable future. Instead there would be hearings via video conference. Since the detainees would normally only have a chance to meet their lawyer in person just before the hearings, and since judges would not be able to directly assess the credibility of the detainees in person, this would make their situation even more detrimental, the managing director of the Immigration Practice for the Bronx Defenders, Sarah Deri Oshiro, has said.

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