

Two Cuban detainees surrender in Louisiana jail standoff

Kate Randall
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Two of the Cubans holding hostages at a jail in St. Martinsville, Louisiana surrendered to police on Friday. They also released one of the deputies being held, Brandon Boudreaux, and three female inmates. The detainees surrendering to authorities were identified as Mario Mora Medina and Gerardo Santana.

Five Cuban detainees, held under the auspices of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) at the rural St. Martin Parish Correctional Center, took the jail warden and two deputies hostage on Monday. Using home-made knives, the men overtook the warden and deputies as they were returning from an exercise period on the roof of the jail.

Officials from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Louisiana State Police have been negotiating with the detainees since Monday. Dozens of police in riot gear continue to surround the facility. About 100 of the approximately 170 inmates in the facility have been released throughout the week. Of the 70 still in the jail, 51 are being held for the INS.

The INS routinely contracts with county and parish jails to incarcerate immigrants on the agency's behalf. The majority of these immigrants are from countries with limited or no diplomatic relations with the US, including Cuba, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Iran, Iraq and Libya, among others. Even those individuals who complete their prison sentences will not be released by the INS, because their countries of origin will not accept them and the US refuses to allow them refugee status. There are no guarantees for these "long-term unremovables" that they will ever be released from prison.

It is estimated that there are 2,500 Cuban immigrants presently being detained by the INS in US jails and prisons, most of these individuals having come to the country in the Mariel boatlift of 1980. About 1,400 of

these immigrants are being held in local jails.

Jonne Ponte Landrian, 28, one of the detainees involved in the hostage situation in St. Martinsville, completed his sentence on a burglary charge in 1992, but is still being held. He filed a federal lawsuit November 30 charging St. Martin jail warden Todd Louvriere, one of the hostages, with civil rights violations. The INS reports that the four detainees leading the takeover at the jail have all completed their state sentences.

Earlier on Friday two of the hostages, warden Louvriere and guard Jolie Sonnier, spoke over the jail's public address system, criticizing the US policy of indefinite detention of Cuban immigrants. "We're trying to publicize the unfair practices the United States has put into action against the detainees," Louvriere said.



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