

US: Contractors shredded thousands of immigration documents

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In the wake of the September 11 attacks, the Bush administration has seized on supposed visa violations to sweep up thousands of immigrants, mainly from the Middle East, often holding them without access to their families or attorneys.

Just last December in southern California, hundreds of resident aliens from the Middle East required to register under post-9/11 laws were arrested. Last month, in "Operation Game Day," the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) arrested some 50 immigrant workers who had access to Super Bowl venues in San Diego.

Throughout, spokespersons for immigrant advocacy groups have complained that INS records were inaccurate, and that many of the people being swept up had done everything possible to comply with INS requirements. They have charged that INS paperwork backups were responsible for incorrect lists of visa violators.

It seems there is more to these complaints than meets the eye. Last Thursday, the Los Angeles United States Attorney's office announced the indictment of two supervisors at an Orange County INS center, Dawn Randall and Leonel Salazar, who allegedly destroyed thousands of records last year so that they could claim to have eliminated a backlog of applications for asylum, as well as other INS paperwork logjams.

According to the indictment, by last summer some 90,000 documents had been shredded, including passports, birth and marriage certificates, and INS applications and notices. Apparently, Randall claimed to have reduced the paperwork backlog to "zero," and kept it that way by trashing all the applications that were not processed in a timely manner.

Babek Sotodah, an attorney and the president of the Alliance of Iranian Americans, told the *Los Angeles*

Daily Journal, "People show up, and the INS claims their documents are not there because the [INS] people have not filed them." Peter Schey, an attorney representing arrested immigrants, has asked that the INS stop all expulsion proceedings until the full extent of the lost records can be determined.

Neither of the people indicted are actually government workers. The INS "privatized" this part of its operation by entering into a \$325 million contract with "Service Center Operating Team," a joint venture consisting of corporations from Texas, Virginia and Maryland.



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