

Young woman targeted for opposing immigration policy as Trump steps up campaign of intimidation

Patrick Martin
9 March 2017

Press reports from around the United States document the stepped-up efforts of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), acting on the basis of the executive orders issued by President Trump, to deport longtime residents of the United States. In many cases, individuals have been targeted for no other purpose than to intimidate the immigrant community.

Attorneys for Daniela Vargas, a young immigrant brought to the United States from Argentina when she was seven years old, have filed a petition in federal court charging that US immigration officers violated her First Amendment right to freedom of speech, targeting her for arrest after she spoke at a news conference in Jackson, Mississippi against the arrest of her father and brother.

The Southern Poverty Law Center and the National Immigration Law Center joined with Vargas's immigration attorneys to seek a writ of habeas corpus Monday in the US District Court for the Western District of Louisiana, the location of the ICE detention center where Vargas is being held.

"She was targeted for speaking out against the ICE enforcement actions in the Jackson area and for going public with her story," Michelle Lapointe, a senior staff attorney with the Southern Poverty Law Center, told the media. "We want to send a message to ICE that they cannot behave in this manner that targets people for exercising their 1st Amendment rights."

Vargas, 22, is one of several young immigrants seized by ICE who had been accepted under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, the temporary protection against deportation offered under an Obama administration executive order which new president Donald Trump has not rescinded.

At the news conference March 1, Vargas said, "Today my father and brother await deportation while I continue to fight this battle as a 'Dreamer' to help contribute to this country which I feel is very much my country." Minutes later, she was stopped by ICE agents and arrested.

The habeas corpus petition filed Monday night argues, "The arrest, detention, and imminent deportation that Ms. Vargas currently faces have injured her and continue to injure her, and would chill any person of ordinary firmness from continuing to speak out on issues related to immigration enforcement and policy."

There have been conflicting statements from federal officials over whether Vargas will have her case heard by an immigration judge, or simply deported to Argentina without a court hearing.

In a similar case in Seattle, Washington, another young immigrant enrolled in the DACA program, Daniel Ramirez Medina, has charged that US immigration officials and local police falsified a statement that he made and signed after he was arrested along with his immigrant father on February 5.

Ramirez, a 23-year-old who was brought to the US at age 7 by his parents, was the first DACA enrollee to be arrested and processed for deportation under the Trump administration. ICE officials claimed that Ramirez had admitted to gang affiliation and that this superseded his DACA status.

Attorneys for Ramirez have submitted evidence that his statement allegedly admitting gang affiliation was doctored. A full sentence written by Ramirez reads: "I came in and the officers said I have gang affiliation with gangs so I wear an orange uniform." A large eraser smudge mark deleted the first seven words, turning the allegation by a policeman into a confession by the prisoner that "I have gang affiliation with gangs so I wear an orange uniform."

A Justice Department official has now admitted that "it is clear that Petitioner is denying, rather than admitting, to gang affiliation," but the government is nonetheless claiming that Ramirez has such ties and these vitiate his DACA status.

Another outrageous immigration case involves a US Army veteran who served two tours in Afghanistan, suffering serious brain injuries during his second deployment, and

who now faces deportation to Mexico because of a drug conviction in 2010. Miguel Perez was born in Mexico but grew up in Chicago, and was a legal permanent resident when he enlisted in the Army in 2001, believing this would give him automatic citizenship.

He returned from Afghanistan with post-traumatic stress disorder, which his family says was not properly treated, and he turned to alcohol and drugs. He was eventually arrested for offering to sell cocaine to an undercover cop. His attorneys are now claiming asylum, saying he fears for his life if deported to Mexico, which he left as a child.

According to an immigrant rights group, Perez is one of thousands of green-card veterans who now face deportation under the new, stricter enforcement order issued by President Trump on January 25.

In Cincinnati, Ohio, Khoudiedia Nianghane, a West African native who has lived in the US for 20 years and has three US citizen children, was deported late Saturday night to Senegal, after spending more than 18 months in detention. One daughter is a college student, while her other son and daughter, aged 17 and 13 respectively, are in school on Cincinnati's west side.

Nianghane, who doesn't speak English, missed a court date regarding her immigration status, giving ICE an opportunity to select her for deportation. Her attorney, Douglas Wiegler, told Cincinnati media that he could find no reason why ICE had prioritized her for deportation, since she has no criminal record of any kind, living quietly and raising her children.

Press reports suggest that ICE has been instructed to target Africans as part of the Trump crackdown. According to ThinkProgress, 130 people were deported to Senegal on the night of Saturday, March 4 to Sunday, March 5. Nianghane was one of them. This compares to 21 deportations to Senegal in all of 2016, and 22 in all of 2015.

In Houston, Texas, Armando Garcia Mendez, a 41-year-old taco vendor who has lived in the United States for 23 years, was arrested February 8 by four armed ICE agents on a deportation order that dates back to when he first came to this country in 1994, fleeing the civil war in his native Guatemala.

Shortly before dawn four weeks ago, Garcia was preparing one of his trucks for the breakfast crowd. Four agents in ballistic vests emblazoned with "ICE Police" rushed out of an unmarked vehicle, handcuffed him, and took him away. He remains in detention. The Houston ICE office declared, in response to press inquiries about the case, that it was "focused on smart, effective immigration enforcement that targets criminal aliens who present the greatest risk to the security of our communities."

How this applies to a man who came to the US at age 18,

seeking to escape being drafted in the military force of a brutal dictatorship, and who has a wife and children, and is well known in the community as a hardworking small businessman, was not explained.

These cases, and thousands like them, are the human face of the crackdown ordered by the Trump administration. In many instances, the ground had already been prepared under the Obama administration: people identified, even detained, awaiting only the White House order to set the machinery of expulsion to work.

Meanwhile, the new head of Trump's deportation machine, Secretary of Homeland Security John F. Kelly, a retired general, told CNN Monday that he was actively considering a program to separate immigrant children and their parents when they are arrested together in the border area.

He confirmed a recent Reuters report, said that he is "considering exactly that" as a way to deter Central American refugees from making the long trek north across Mexico to the Rio Grande.

Kelly was asked by CNN anchor Wolf Blitzer, "If you get some young kids who manage to sneak into the United States with their parents, are Department of Homeland Security personnel going to separate the children from their moms and dads?"

Kelly's response was so emphatic and blunt that it took even Blitzer, a diehard defender of the American capitalist state, by surprise. "We have tremendous experience in dealing with unaccompanied minors," he said. "We turn them over to HHS, and they do a very, very good job..." He continued: "Yes, I am considering, in order to deter more movement along this terribly dangerous network, I am considering exactly that. They will be well cared for as we deal with their parents."

In the three months ending January 31, 2017, some 54,000 children and parents were seized by ICE and Border Patrol agents, double the number arrested in the same period a year earlier.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact