

Three dead in US immigration custody in one week, two from suicide

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In the past week, three people have died in the custody of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) across the country. Two of the deaths were suicides.

This brings to eight the total number of deaths in the custody of ICE since October, the start of the fiscal year. This compares to nine during the fiscal year that ended last September.

Jean Jiménez-Joseph, 27, a Panamanian national, was being held in an immigration detention center in Stewart County, a little over 100 miles southwest of Atlanta, Georgia. He died after he was found unresponsive, with a bedsheets around his neck, in his solitary confinement cell at 12:45 am Monday. He had been isolated in solitary confinement for 19 days.

Detention center officials reportedly placed Jiménez-Joseph in isolation on April 27 after he jumped over a rail from the second floor to the first floor of the facility.

Jiménez-Joseph was handed over to ICE officials on March 2, after completing a sentence for larceny of a motor vehicle at a North Carolina jail. He was in the middle of deportation proceedings at the time of his death.

The following day, on the other side of the country, a Nicaraguan man died of injuries sustained from his attempted suicide a week prior. Osmar Epifanio Gonzalez-Gadba, 32, had been detained for just over five months in the Adelanto Detention Facility in California.

Gonzalez-Gadba was rushed to Victor Valley Global Medical Center's intensive care unit in Victorville, California after he was found hanging from a bedsheets tied around his neck in his cell. He died from heart failure caused by asphyxiation six days later.

Like Jiménez-Joseph, Gonzalez-Gadba was being

held in solitary confinement. Some reports are suggesting that this was requested by Gonzalez-Gadba himself, which sometimes occurs if the detainee feels unsafe for whatever reason. ICE spokeswoman, Virginia Kice, told the *Washington Post*, "There are officers and medical personnel who make rounds regularly, but in a case like his, this individual was housed in a one-person room, so he was alone when it occurred and they discovered him fairly quickly."

He was initially arrested in the Otay Mesa neighborhood of San Diego by US Border Patrol agents on December 29, 2016, while attempting to reenter the country. According to the Department of Homeland Security, he had been deported back to Nicaragua once before, in April 2016.

His mother, still living in Nicaragua, told Nicaragua's TN8 News that she had not known where her son was until she was told of his death.

Nationwide, an average of 300 detainees are held in solitary confinement each week. According to the data released by ICE, which covered four months, nearly half of those placed in isolation are held there for 15 days or longer. Nearly 11 percent were mentally ill.

The third death, of Indian national Atulkumar Babubhai Patel, occurred Tuesday in Atlanta Georgia. Patel, 58, was being detained by federal immigration authorities in Atlanta City Detention Center. He was found to have high blood pressure and diabetes during his initial screening upon entering the facility. On Saturday, he was transported to Grady hospital after a nurse checking his blood sugar noticed he was short of breath. His preliminary cause of death has been ruled as complications from congestive heart failure.

Patel arrived at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport on May 10 aboard a flight from Quito, Ecuador. He did not have the required

immigration documents, according to ICE, so he was placed in the federal agency's custody.

The latest deaths are only some of the casualties from the Trump administration's assault on immigrant workers, an escalation of the anti-immigrant policies of previous administrations, Democrat and Republican.

According to data from ICE, arrests of immigrants increased 38 percent during the first three months of 2017, over the same period last year.

The number of people arrested between January and March 2017 was a shocking 41,000 individuals. More than 10,000 of these were classified as "non-criminal immigrants," up 150 percent from last year.



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