

US continues to terrorize immigrants: Over 500 children still not reunited with parents

Trévon Austin
22 August 2018

Over 500 immigrant children who were separated from their parents by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials, under the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" immigration policy, have yet to be reunited despite court orders.

In June, US District Judge Dana Sabraw ordered the Trump administration reunite parents by July 26 with the more than 2,500 children, aged up to 17, that had been taken from them at the border. Under massive public pressure demanding an accounting of the separated children, the US government released figures last Thursday that show many families have still not been reunited, two months after Sabraw's court order.

Out of 2,654 children initially in government custody, 2,089 have been "discharged," meaning the children have been reunited with their parents or placed with sponsors within the United States. The exact proportion who have been returned to their parents from whom they were taken, not a guardian, remains unclear. The remaining 565 children are still being detained by the government. Of those, 24 children are under the age of 5. Parents of 366 of the still-separated children have been deported and are no longer in the US. Six children under the age of 5 have parents who have been deported.

The Trump administration has offered a slew of excuses as to why families have still not been reunited. Government officials have claimed many parents either cannot be located or face criminal charges.

The vast majority of crimes parents have been accused of are dubious nonviolent offenses, such as traffic violations or minor drug cases. The claim that one parent in US custody is wanted for murder in Guatemala remains unsubstantiated. The repeated accusations that these immigrants are "criminals" are completely bogus. They are being used to whip up anti-

immigrant sentiment and scapegoat this section of the population for the dire state of social conditions.

This attempt to demonize immigrants has very little traction among the population. Judge Sabraw, who ruled in the case about reuniting children with parents, made it clear that the alleged "crimes" of parents do not justify tearing children away from their families. Earlier this month, Sabraw expressed his opposition to the government's actions.

"For every parent who is not located, there will be a permanently orphaned child," Sabraw said in his San Diego courtroom. "That is 100 percent the responsibility of the administration."

In many cases, parents were reportedly tricked or coerced into being deported while their children remained in the United States.

David Xol, a deported Guatemalan immigrant, told the *Texas Tribune* that immigration officials told him to sign his own deportation papers because he would be sent back to Guatemala without his son regardless if he signed them or not. Months later, Xol's seven-year-old son Bryon remains 1,000 miles away from his family in a shelter in Baytown, Texas.

Despite the immense public outrage and the recent court ruling, ICE officials have continued the ruthless policy of separating children from their parents as a means of punishment and coercion.

Last week, ICE agents forcibly removed more than a dozen fathers from Karnes County detention center in Texas, where they were being held with their sons after being reunited. Attorneys representing the 16 fathers said the families were then re-separated in retaliation for a planned nonviolent protest by those detained against their treatment by the government.

In a statement provided to *The Daily Beast*, ICE spokesperson Nina Pruneda said that roughly 40 men at

the Karnes detention facility “were involved in a disturbance,” and that it had deployed law enforcement “to control the situation.”

The Karnes County detention center houses about 630 men and their sons who were separated under Trump’s zero tolerance policy. Last Wednesday, armed officers stormed the rooms where the fathers were being held, handcuffed them, and sent them to another detention center 90 minutes away. Meanwhile, the men’s children were placed in two separate rooms, with no information about where their fathers had been sent or whether they would see them again. All of the men who were re-separated are currently pursuing legal resident status in the US, including many who have sought asylum status.

The fathers were reunited with their sons the next day, but the separation exacted a large psychological toll. A man was reported to have vomited blood after being taken to the separate detention center, and one man attempted to hang himself with a bedsheet.

The level of barbarity employed against detained immigrants is equaled in the methods of apprehension. ICE raids continue daily throughout the US, terrorizing immigrant communities and imposing irreversible emotional and psychological damage to those caught up in the dragnet. In San Bernardino, California, ICE agents arrested a man driving his pregnant wife to the hospital for a scheduled C-section last week.

While on the way to the hospital, the couple stopped at a gas station where surveillance footage shows ICE officers who had been following them in two black SUVs approached and asked for identification. Maria del Carmen Venegas, 32, showed the officers her driver’s license, but her husband, Joel Arrona-Lara, 36, told the officers he did not have his papers because he had left the house in a hurry.

According to Venegas, her husband asked officers if he could return home to retrieve documentation, just down the street. The officers refused his request, then handcuffed Arrona-Lara, leaving Venegas sobbing in distress alone at the gas station. She was then forced to drive herself to the hospital and give birth to their son alone.

In a statement on Saturday, an ICE spokeswoman defended the arrest, saying that Arrona-Lara “was brought to ICE’s attention due to an outstanding warrant issued for his arrest in Mexico on homicide

charges.” However, the agency’s official statement on his arrest only stated he was arrested for “illegally residing in the United States.”

Furthermore, Aronna-Lara’s lawyers say they can find no record in Mexico of a warrant for his arrest and that he may have been mistaken for his brother, who has served jail time in Mexico.

Aronna-Lara is currently being held in a detention center in Orange County awaiting deportation. The couple has lived in the United States for more than 10 years and have five children, including their newborn baby.

The Trump administration’s “zero tolerance” policy has caused thousands of families immeasurable psychological and emotional trauma. Families continue to be separated at the border, while ICE, an organization reminiscent of Nazi Germany’s Gestapo, terrorizes families in the US.

The scenes reported almost daily of the brutality being meted out against the immigrant population have provoked widespread revulsion from people in the US and around the world. Leading the charge to contain this opposition has been the Democratic Party, which has only offered a few hollow and cynical denunciations of ICE and the Trump administration’s policies.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact