

Lutheran student pastor Betty Rendón deported back to Colombia less than a month after being detained by ICE

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Less than a month after being held at gunpoint and kidnapped in her home by Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) agents, Betty Rendón, a grandmother, wife and aspiring Lutheran pastor was deported to Colombia last Tuesday, May 28, along with her husband, Carlos Hincapié. The couple had resided in their Chicago home for over 10 years before ICE agents detained them last month.

The nightmare for Rendón and her family began on May 8, when her daughter, Paula Hincapie, was illegally stopped by multiple ICE agents in an unmarked vehicle as she was driving her five-year-old daughter to school. Agents declined to state why they had pulled over Paula, who is a DACA recipient, and not subject to deportation. The agents separated the mother from her daughter, and under the guise of returning her home, drove the frightened 5-year-old back home while agents handcuffed and arrested her mother.

Upon arriving at the Rendóns' residence, less than three blocks from where the illegal traffic stop took place, armed agents descended upon the family home, and with guns drawn, they grabbed Betty, her husband and a cousin, Felipe. At the time of her arrest, Betty was still in her pajamas getting ready for the day.

After agents arrested the family, they failed to properly lock the home which was subsequently ransacked by looters. Betty, her cousin and husband were then transported more than 60 miles away from their home in Englewood on Chicago's southside to a detention facility in Kenosha County, Wisconsin. Less than two weeks later, Betty and Carlos were bussed to the Pulaski County Jail in Ullin, Illinois, approximately 350 miles from the family home, or about a six-hour

drive.

While Betty and her family were shuffled between the various detention facilities and jails located throughout the Midwest, she, like the approximately 52,000 people currently imprisoned by ICE, was subject to humiliating full-body-cavity strip searches and forced to reside in dilapidated detention facilities, unable to reach out to friends or family.

During her internment, family, church members, and community supporters rallied to free the family, who have lived in the United States for over 15 years since fleeing violence, brought on by an over-40-year civil war in Colombia. US imperialism pumped over \$3.3 billion in "military aid" to the country between 2002 and 2004 fueling the bloody conflict. The violence touched all aspects of Colombian society including the school where Betty was a principal. In 2004, guerrilla rebels, seeking to bolster their forces, threatened to kill her unless they were allowed to recruit from the student populace. Faced with the threat of imminent violence, or possibly death, Betty and her family made the difficult decision to flee to the United States, and promptly applied for a tourists' visas and later asylum.

Despite the clear threat to her life, immigration officials denied her asylum request in 2009, stating that they couldn't find the paperwork to "verify" her asylum claim. Despite this setback, the student pastor continued to apply for legal status while building a new life for her and her family in America. Her husband held steady work in the construction industry while Betty continued her studies and was set to begin her doctorate at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago this June

Despite receiving petitions with more than 15,000

signatures, and 65 letters of support from community organizations, ICE declined Betty and Carlos's stay of removal request on May 24, which was submitted by Diana Rashid, an attorney with the National Immigrant Justice Center in Chicago.

Rashid recalled the conversation she had with a supervising ICE officer in the Chicago field office in an interview with the *Chicago-Sun Times*: "I got a call earlier this afternoon from the supervising officer at the ICE field office to let us know that the stay was denied. When I asked him why, he said that there were 'insufficient reasons warranting a stay.' I asked him to elaborate, and all he said was, 'I don't know what to tell you.'"

Once Betty and Carlos's stay of removal request was denied, the agency moved with a frenetic pace to deport the husband and wife. Within a week, the pair were loaded onto a bus destined for an ICE detention center in Oakdale, Louisiana, 570 miles from the Pulaski County Jail. Upon arriving at the facility the Rendóns were booked for the next chartered flight to Bogota, Colombia, which they boarded on May 28, a mere 20 days after their initial arrest.

While the family and community members were searching for any means to stop this barbaric removal, local politicians and immigrants' rights groups, including Voces de la Frontera, advocated that concerned citizens "reach out" to Democrat Senators Dick Durbin of Illinois and Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin.

Neither of the senators was concerned enough to send out a perfunctory tweet in support of the Rendóns, much less actively fight or organize for their freedom. Instead, Baldwin spent the day Betty was being flown back to Colombia bloviating on Twitter about the Mueller investigation while Durbin also remained silent on the Rendóns' plight.

Despite the terrible circumstances thrust onto Betty and her family, they are trying to remain positive and have received support from workers and youth around the world. Upon arriving in Bogota, Betty and Carlos were taken in by good Samaritans and Betty was able to send a letter back home. In her letter, Betty stated her intention to begin a new ministry in Colombia that will seek to help deported immigrants and refugees fight the inhumane immigration system.

"I think it is necessary to develop a Ministry in the

Colombian consulate that provides better care and a better welcome to these people who arrive with broken hearts, without suitcases, without clothes, without possibilities of making a call and without money to eat and buy the passage to finish arriving at the destination place. Each person has felt violently attacked by ICE, either because they violently entered their home or were attacked at their place of work, on the street, or in their car. The prisons seem purgatory, a place you only hear the crying and the gnashing of teeth."

In a final insult, it is possible that Betty will never be able to see her daughter or granddaughter again. Due to Paula's immigration status as a DACA recipient, if she leaves the US she will not be allowed to return.



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