

Injured Honduran worker detained by US border agents after speaking out about deadly New Orleans hotel collapse

Aaron Murch
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One of the workers injured in the Hard Rock Hotel construction site collapse in New Orleans on October 12 is still under detention by Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) after appearing on Spanish language television discussing with reporters the injuries he sustained in the collapse. The Honduran national, Delmer Ramirez-Palma, fell over three stories when the top floors of the building that was under construction at the time, collapsed, killing three workers. Two bodies are still unrecovered.

An ICE spokesman said they arrested the man after being notified by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service agents that Ramirez-Palma had been fishing without a license. He is currently being held in a processing facility awaiting deportation.

Ramirez-Palma is among the five injured workers who are currently seeking damages in the Orleans Parish Civil District Court from the owners and managers of the property at Canal and Rampart, which collapsed. They charge the owners used improper and inadequate materials and supports.

Personal injury attorneys representing Ramirez-Palma claim that he has yet to receive proper medical treatment since being detained by ICE as he requires surgery for his injuries and the detention facility where he is being held near Oakdale, Louisiana, cannot currently provide this. His attorneys, Jeremy Pichon, Eric Wright and Daryl Gray, will be opposing his deportation as well, coming as it did within a day of Palma talking to Spanish language reporters about the conditions that lead to his injuries and the horrific collapse of the unfinished hotel.

Daryl Gray claims this kind of retaliatory arrest could be preventing other workers from coming forward with

information about the construction site. “[They] fear ... being deported or some other retribution by their employers,” he said at a news conference in the lobby of Civil District Court. “Just like all Americans, however, they do have the rights that are afforded to us within this courthouse.”

On the subject of immigrant worker intimidation Gray added, "Immigrants are exploited for the growth of our great nation," Gray continued “And that does not have to be the case.” One of the other attorneys working on the litigation told reporters that there were many other workers, immigrants included, who came forward with information about the dangers surrounding the construction of the building, but were ignored.

Official investigations were halted this week so that the two dangerously precarious cranes looming over the partially collapsed building could be stabilized in what has been called a controlled demolition meant to implode the remains of the structure. On Sunday, strategically placed explosives were set off around the cranes in order to make the site secure and safe for recovery and investigation.

The explosion was meant to bring the cranes down without further damaging the site or disturbing the yet unrecovered bodies of the two deceased workers. The bodies of two of the three workers killed in the collapse are believed to be somewhere underneath several floors of collapse debris. Once the bodies are recovered, officials say they plan to launch a full investigation into the incident.

After the explosives went off, one crane fell, but the other is still leaning perilously over the roof of the property. Officials, however, claim that the site is

secure enough to launch a recovery operation of the final two bodies before “full demolition” of the entire site can begin.

Securing the disaster site and blocking off nearby roads is costing an estimated \$400,000 a day, as dozens of construction workers and engineers inspect the wreckage. For her part, New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell promised that the “responsible party” will be charged with recouping those costs once they are determined in subsequent investigations.



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