

Venezuelan man nearly dies after being denied medical care at Florida Everglades concentration camp

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A 38-year-old Venezuelan man nearly died this week after falling seriously ill inside the ICE concentration camp known as “Alligator Alcatraz,” located in the Florida Everglades. As part of the ongoing mass deportation campaign, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is subjecting thousands of people to inhumane and deadly conditions.

Authorities at the prison camp have refused to carry out testing for COVID-19, which appears to be spreading throughout the camp without any public acknowledgement. Earlier this month, a whistleblower employee at the camp told Florida’s WFLA that she was fired after contracting COVID-19.

According to a press release issued by his legal team, Luis Manuel Rivas Velásquez—also known as Luis Frio on Instagram—collapsed inside the camp after exhibiting symptoms of a serious respiratory illness. According to at least one witness, Rivas Velásquez was denied medical care after he collapsed.

“A guy is dying on the floor, and no one has called for medical help. The paramedics aren’t here,” a detainee recalled in a phone call shared with NBC6 Miami.

After collapsing some point on Tuesday for roughly 48 hours, Rivas Velásquez was held incommunicado from his family and lawyers. During this period, it was unknown if Rivas Velásquez had died.

Rivas Velásquez’s pro-bono immigration attorneys Eric Lee and Chris Godshall-Bennett wrote in their statement that while Rivas Velásquez was in the hospital receiving treatment, immigration thugs handcuffed him tightly to the bed and mocked him, with one guard telling another they needed to be “tough” on him.

Rivas Velásquez, like the vast majority of those

kidnapped by the US immigration Gestapo, is not a convicted criminal or a threat to society. Before he was taken by immigration agents, Rivas Velásquez was an influencer on social media, regularly sharing photos and videos of cars, Miami, family and friends to his over 160,000 followers.

It was not until Thursday morning that lawyers and family confirmed that Rivas Velásquez was alive after he was allowed to make a brief phone call. When he was allowed to speak to his family and attorneys, he described conditions inside the facility as “worse than jail,” saying, “They are treating us like dogs, like animals. People are suffering from lack of medicine.”

In a statement Thursday, Rivas Velásquez’s sister, Ada Yeniree Velásquez Pereira, said her brother “is not in good health. And according to the testimonies we have received, 80 percent of the people detained there are not either. This is not an isolated situation: It is a humanitarian emergency.”

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which oversees ICE, is attempting to cover up what appears to be a serious viral outbreak. The facility was hastily erected in the Everglades earlier this year to warehouse immigrants en masse. Now, detainees are reporting outbreaks of disease, inedible food, backed-up sewage, beatings by guards and the total denial of medical and legal support.

A recent phone call from a detainee inside the camp that was shared on social media captures the horror.

“There is a lot, a lot of abuse, too much abuse. In the dining room there was a lot of abuse. They stepped on him and stepped on his head. A guard got on top of him and they pushed us and kicked us. There is a lot of abuse ... in Alligator Alcatraz.

“We are very nervous here because we don’t know

what to do. We are stuck. They are finishing with us inside here.

“It has to come out somehow because they’re going to kill us! They’re killing us little by little here.

“We have been here for 30 days, I’ve been seeking justice and the mistreatment doesn’t stop!”

These statements were recorded during a phone call in which detainees broke out into a protest, attempting to make themselves heard beyond the walls of the facility.

“Everyone is protesting. This is turning into chaos! ... They are treating us like the most vicious animals in the world. And we are not the vicious ones, they are! The guards! They’re all abusing their power!”

In an interview with NBC Thursday, attorney James Hollis, who is also representing Rivas Velásquez, confirmed that before he collapsed on Tuesday he had asked repeatedly for help, explaining to the guards that he was experiencing chest pain and shortness of breath. Hollis said Rivas Velásquez was “continually told, ‘Hey, we can’t help you.’”

Upon arriving at the Kendall Hospital in Miami, he was diagnosed with a respiratory infection by doctors. Despite continued breathing difficulties, he was then returned to the concentration camp on Thursday.

In a chilling and cynical statement, DHS Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin claimed Rivas Velásquez had merely “fainted” and was taken to the hospital “out of precaution.” She added, “ICE takes its commitment to protecting those in its custody very seriously.”

This is a lie. At least 11 people have died in US immigration detention this year. On Tuesday morning, 32-year-old Chaofeng Ge was found hanging by the neck in a shower room in Pennsylvania. ICE and state police claim his death was a suicide. He had been imprisoned since January.

The situation at “Alligator Alcatraz” is part of a nationwide expansion of the immigration gulag system under the Trump administration’s “big beautiful bill,” which included the largest expansion of border enforcement in US history, alongside billions in tax cuts for the rich. This expansion has been made possible by the Democratic Party which provided Trump the votes to fast-track the anti-immigrant Laken Riley Act and the necessary votes to keep the government funded and operating this past March.

The outbreak in the Florida Everglades camp is not an anomaly. It was only weeks ago that a tuberculosis outbreak was confirmed at the Tacoma ICE facility in

Washington state. There is every reason to believe a similar outbreak, whether TB or COVID-19, is now sweeping through the Everglades camp.

The same day Rivas Velásquez nearly died on August 5, Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. announced the cancellation of \$500 million in vaccine grants, signaling that the federal government is not only ignoring outbreaks inside detention centers, it is dismantling the public health infrastructure altogether.

The war on immigrants is inseparable from the war on public health, democratic rights and the working class as a whole. If immigrants today can be treated like animals, tortured, denied medical care and disappeared without recourse, tomorrow it will be citizens and any who resist the tyranny of the financial oligarchy.

In a damning joint statement, attorneys Eric Lee and Chris Godshall-Bennett of Lee & Godshall-Bennett LLP condemned the abuse:

Crimes of historic proportions are taking place at the “Alligator Alcatraz” internment camp. Mr. Rivas Velásquez’s disappearance and potential near-death experience in the custody of DHS and State of Florida must be a wake-up call for all Americans. None of us can claim ignorance. Will we allow crimes like this to be committed by the government in our own backyard? This sadistic human experiment must be immediately shut down. All those responsible for creating deliberately inhumane conditions must be criminally investigated and prosecuted to the full extent of the law.



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