New revelations confirm DHS cover-up in near-death of Venezuelan detainee Luis Manuel Rivas Velásquez

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It appears the US government is doing everything in its power to ensure that Luis Manuel Rivas Velásquez, a 38-year-old Venezuelan who nearly died last week at the Florida Everglades concentration camp after being denied medical care, does not survive.

New details revealed in phone calls made public by one of Rivas Velásquez's attorneys, Eric Lee of Lee & Godshall-Bennett LLP, confirm that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and ICE contractors are not only lying about the criminal and inhumane conditions at the Florida detention center, but they are continuing to deprive Rivas Velásquez access to his attorneys and to doctors at the detention center in El Paso, Texas, to which he has since been moved.

Last Tuesday, Rivas Velásquez, a car enthusiast and social media influencer with over a quarter million followers online, collapsed while detained inside "Alligator Alcatraz," the recently opened immigrant detention camp located on an airport tarmac in the middle of Florida's steaming swamps. Designed to hold up to 5,000 humans, currently some 700 people are languishing in the tents which the *New York Times* reported earlier this month are built in an area that over the last 35 years has seen a tropical storm or hurricane pass through "once every two years, on average."

Speaking to Lee on August 7 after he was hospitalized for two days, Rivas Velásquez confirmed that he and other detainees were being denied access to medical care and bathing facilities. He said, "I am living the hell of Alcatraz. Conditions are not optimal. The medicine doesn't arrive on time. We bathe only once a week…"

Another detainee at the facility confirmed to Lee that Rivas Velásquez suffered a serious medical emergency on Tuesday and did not simply "faint," as the DHS claimed. The detainee said that Rivas Velásquez was already suffering from flu-like symptoms and was lying on his bed with muffled breathing "like he was gone, and he turned facing up."

The eyewitness said some other detainees also noticed and went to touch Rivas Velásquez, "and he didn't react. He didn't react and right away we tried to give him first aid there, try to resuscitate him ... and we called for them to open the tent to take him out ... to get emergency care." Rivas Velásquez's wife confirmed that another detainee, a nurse from Cuba, provided cardiopulmonary resuscitation, without which her husband might have died.

The eyewitness said that they and a couple other detainees moved Rivas Velásquez to a "corridor" and that guards instructed them to leave him lying on the floor. The guards had "no medical training." The eyewitness continued: "Here the doctors have practically no training whatsoever. Besides, there are no specialists here either. Emergency care does not exist."

The eyewitness confirmed that Rivas Velásquez was left on the floor for "about half an hour," and one person attempted to take his pulse. "They didn't even know how to take his pulse. … All they did was turn him sideways and give him like a massage on the back, but that's no good."

Once medical personnel did arrive, they did not move with a sense of urgency. "They came slow, walking as if nothing had happened. ... There was not the right attention in the sense of haste, of trying to use every

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possible minute to be able to save his life, because you do not know what is happening to him."

The same person said that approximately 100 detainees witnessed Rivas Velásquez being left on the ground without medical care and that "mostly everyone" inside the facility, including staff, was sick. The detainee also confirmed that medical masks to prevent the spread of contagion are not "given to you, they are taken away."

Since "Alligator Alcatraz" began operations last month, those at the Florida detention camp have reported deplorable conditions, including backed-up toilets, insufficient and inedible food, indifferent and sadistic guards and limited access to legal help or leisure activities. Water has to be transported to the camp, and refuse removed from it, as there is no onsite plumbing. This has led guards to impose limits on baths and water usage, leading to sickness and disease, which appears to be running rampant throughout the camp.

Last Thursday, US District Judge Kathleen Williams issued a temporary restraining order halting all new construction at the Florida facility for 14 days in response to a lawsuit brought by several environmental groups and the Miccosukee Tribe. The plaintiffs argue that the concentration camp violates several environmental laws and did not undergo proper permitting prior to construction and operation.

Following the call on August 7, ICE blocked Lee and other attorneys from contacting Rivas Velásquez for two days. On August 9, Rivas Velásquez managed a brief call from inside the El Paso Enhanced Hardened Facility in Texas, where his health was again deteriorating due to continued denial of medical treatment. His last words before the line was cut off were, "Help! I don't want to die here."

Later that day, the El Paso Fire Department dispatched a medical team to the facility, but ICE agents barred them from entering or seeing the detainee.

Any objective observer would conclude that ICE and DHS are doing everything in their power to ensure that Rivas Velásquez dies in their custody. His death would mark at least the twelfth killing in ICE detention this year, following the August 5 death of Chaofeng Ge at the Moshannon Valley Processing Center in Pennsylvania.

The deplorable conditions inside America's immigration gulag are not unintended but the deliberate result of government policies aimed at dehumanizing large swaths of the population in order to prepare the working class to accept mass death from preventable disease, climate change-induced catastrophes and imperialist war.

The attacks on immigrants are the opening salvo in the ruling class's counterrevolution against all the social, democratic and economic rights won by the working class over the past century. If these attacks are to be halted, workers must unite on a class basis internationally against the parties of big business, which have bolstered the mass deportation and police state apparatus.

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