

“We don’t deserve this treatment”: Immigrants launch hunger strike against torture at Georgia ICE prison

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7 October 2026

Dozens of immigrants launched a hunger strike on October 6 against prolonged imprisonment and torturous conditions at the Folkston D. Ray James Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Processing Center in Georgia. In a courageous video appeal, detainees describe years of confinement, separation from their families and a regime of humiliation enforced by armed guards.

“This video was made by us, immigrants from the ICE prison, where we have been held for years without cause or justification,” said Idris Makhmudov, identified in the video as having spent 27 months in detention without being accused of a crime.

He states: “We are immigrants from all over the world, whom Trump is locking up in prison-like detentions for nothing and for a long time.”

Advocates estimate at least 73 people are participating, according to the *Guardian*. The former prison is operated by the for-profit GEO Group under a contract with ICE, turning asylum seekers and immigrant workers into a source of corporate revenue.

The video appeal gives names and faces to people the Trump administration seeks to bury inside its mass deportation complex. Genaro Jimenez has been detained for 21 months. His mother, sister, wife, five children and three grandchildren are identified in the video as Americans.

Many detainees, Jimenez explains, “have lived in the United States for a long time. This country has become their home with family, friends, colleagues and pets. We have put down deep roots and are not ready to give them up.”

Mujtaba Qeyami, identified as having spent 20 months in detention without a criminal accusation, describes Folkston as “a prison in every way, except that now it’s populated by innocent people.”

“Most of us are asylum seekers who came to the United States seeking protection from political persecution and violence in their home countries,” he explains. Many had fled the threat of political imprisonment, only to find themselves incarcerated in the United States.

Mohammadou Sall, detained for 10 months and likewise identified as accused of no crime, says: “Honor, dignity, respect mean nothing here. The guards insult us, humiliate us, threaten us, and punish us when they want.”

Makhmudov describes the exploitation accompanying this confinement: “We have no internet access. Calls to family and friends are charged. The workers here are paid \$1 a day, which is enough for a 10-minute phone call.”

He continues: “We are led to the chow hall in a line, under guard, armed with non-lethal weapons, with rubber bullets, gas guns and pepper spray.”

The conditions described in the video are documented in a 10-page statement dated September 14, written by Alexey Kovalko and Alexander Borovkov and signed by 14 detainees. The prisoners include Russian asylum seekers. The signatories affirm that they either personally

experienced the abuses or witnessed them. All quotations below from that document have been translated from Russian, including its accounts of remarks by staff and the warden.

The detention periods listed beside the signatures range from five months to 30 months, or two-and-a-half years. Kovalko lists 28 months. Makhmudov, Ayub Umarov and Abdulla Makhmudov each list 26 months. Nikita Kosnikov lists 30 months. The statement also reports cases of detention exceeding three years.

This prolonged imprisonment exposes the fraud of presenting these facilities as temporary processing centers. People seeking protection or redress are deprived of their freedom for years while the companies holding them collect government payments.

GEO’s own disclosures provide a measure of the business involved. In announcing the activation of the 1,868-bed D. Ray James facility in June 2025, the company projected approximately \$66 million in additional annual revenue in its first full year of operations. An August 2025 filing described that projection as revenue at full occupancy. The expansion was attached to the existing agreement for the neighboring 1,118-bed Folkston ICE Processing Center.

For GEO, occupied detention beds generate revenue. Spending on treatment, food and staffing reduces the margin left over. The detainees’ testimony details how their lives and health have been subordinated to this profit-making operation.

“The purpose of this prison is to deport the greatest possible number of people and create conditions in which it is impossible to defend one’s case in immigration court,” Kovalko and Borovkov write.

One doctor, they report, told one of the authors: “My job is not to treat you. The main thing for me is that you don’t croak.”

“This principle is reflected in everything connected with medical care here,” they add.

Kovalko describes being summoned for a blood draw at 4:00 a.m. around January 2025, while held at the neighboring Folkston ICE Processing Center. He lost consciousness during the procedure. When he came to, he was dizzy, weak and unable to stand. He asked to lie down.

Staff took him by the arms and placed him in a bare concrete room containing only a steel toilet. There was no mattress.

“They slammed the door and said: ‘Lie down here!’” he writes. He remained there for hours in summer clothing as the cold caused severe pain.

In another incident, the document says, a detainee who spoke with a psychologist was stripped, given only a nightshirt and confined for three days in a concrete room under constantly illuminated bright lights. He slept on the floor in the cold and became seriously ill.

This is torture designed to break people physically and psychologically. The same methods—sleep deprivation, cold, isolation and the denial of

medical treatment—the US government has used against alleged “terrorists” in Guantanamo Bay, CIA black sites and Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq are being inflicted on innocent people in for-profit prisons.

The statement describes prisoners going years without adequate dental treatment. Detainees are given toothbrushes only 1.5 inches long, including the bristles, which can be held only between the tips of two fingers. Kovalko writes that his repeated complaints of toothache and requests to see a dentist over almost two years were ignored. Another man, identified as Maksim K., ultimately required six extractions after being denied timely treatment.

The denial of dental care is compounded by a diet the authors describe as almost entirely canned or frozen food, sometimes spoiled. Kovalko recounts receiving moldy corn tortillas instead of bread suitable for his food allergy. The statement declares: “Hot drinks and raw vegetables, such as onions, tomatoes and cucumbers, are completely unavailable.”

Drinking water smells foul, while staff drink bottled water that detainees cannot buy even in the commissary. Cotton swabs and nail clippers are prohibited.

The authors describe confinement in a “concrete bunker,” often with only brief access to outdoor exercise and sometimes none for days. Basketball hoops have been cut down. Detainees must walk in single file within marked lines, under armed supervision. In the dining hall, they are assigned seats and threatened with disciplinary isolation for sitting next to whom they choose.

GEO Group is the same private prison company that operates Delaney Hall in Newark, New Jersey, where immigrants launched a hunger and labor strike earlier this year against abusive conditions. In May, Democratic Governor Mickie Sherrill and Newark’s Democratic Mayor Ras Baraka deployed police forces to augment federal agents attacking people demonstrating outside in support of the hunger strikers and against the deplorable conditions.

The Folkston testimony recalls the documented torture at Florida’s “Alligator Alcatraz” and medical neglect of children at Dilley in Texas. Guards at the Florida concentration camp punished detainees by locking them in tiny metal confinement cages outside, while at Dilley children routinely fell gravely ill due to lack of medical care and healthy food. Across the for-profit immigration concentration camp network, imprisonment itself is a means of inflicting physical and psychological injury.

Kovalko writes that at Folkston, during two years in detention he was allowed to speak with his wife, who was held at South Louisiana ICE Processing Center, only “four times, for ten minutes each!”

The authors report letters from attorneys being withheld or delayed and written requests going unanswered. Access to tablets and telephones is interrupted by prolonged lockdowns. Detainees cannot use documents and evidence stored on their confiscated personal electronic devices or copy and send them to prepare their cases.

“All the measures listed above are aimed at making court proceedings and communication with attorneys, human rights advocates and relatives infinitely more difficult,” they write.

The video also describes the political subordination of the immigration court system to the Trump administration. Immigration judges and the Board of Immigration Appeals operate within the Justice Department under the attorney general. Decisions on detention parole are handled by the Department of Homeland Security and ICE. Both agencies are arms of the administration carrying out the mass deportation operation.

“We can appeal the immigration judge’s decision to the BIA (Board of Immigration Appeals), which again is under the attorney general,” Qeyami said.

“Everything that happens inside the prison remains unknown to anyone outside,” Kovalko and Borovkov write. “Arbitrary abuse by staff goes entirely unpunished and is sometimes even encouraged by the

administration.”

They identify the warden, whom the statement does not name, as the source of openly xenophobic threats. Kovalko says he personally heard the warden tell a group in early 2026: “None of you will be released in America. You will all be deported.”

In late July 2026, according to the document, the warden ordered detainees in the dining hall: “Eat faster. This is a prison!” The statement names Yuri Bazilyuk as a witness.

Kovalko also recounts a conversation shortly before Trump’s January 2025 inauguration, during which the warden told him: “We’re only coddling you now because that guy we didn’t vote for is getting in our way. But never mind, our man will be here soon, and then you’ll find out what a real roller-coaster ride is!”

In early 2026, the warden allegedly told Russian detainees: “Don’t worry. We’ll send you to your cozy Gulag.” Kovalko says he heard the threat personally, and the document names another witness, Yakov F.

Those who object risk confinement in a Special Management Unit (SMU). According to the statement, three placements in the SMU result in a higher security classification and transfer to housing with people who have criminal records, with consequences for the immigration process.

People can be sent into isolation for trivial matters, the authors write, “such as sitting in the wrong place in the dining hall, which happened to Yones Davoodi from Iran, or because an officer dislikes them, and so on.” Kovalko says he was punished after switching off a television at 2:00 a.m., having repeatedly asked an officer to turn it off so people could sleep.

The hunger strike, letter and video are powerful calls to action that must be answered by the working class. By speaking publicly across national and linguistic divisions, the detainees have challenged the effort to isolate them from one another and from the working class outside.

“We are not asking for anything special,” Sall says in the video. “We don’t deserve this treatment.”

Their struggle demands the active support of workers throughout the United States and internationally. The immigrants imprisoned at Folkston must be freed and reunited with their families. The fight for their freedom is inseparable from the struggle to abolish the immigration Gestapo and the capitalist system that turns human confinement and suffering into a source of profit.



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