

Honduran Family Sues U.S. Over 'Inhumane' Treatment in Detention



Dallas, August 27 (RHC)-- A Honduran mother and her young son have filed a lawsuit against U.S. authorities, claiming they were mistreated in detention facilities after they entered the country seeking asylum. According to a report by Reuters, the lawsuit, which lawyers say is the first to seek damages by refugees held by U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE), says the "inhumane conditions" were an effort to pressure the pair to abandon their legal claims and to deter other migrants.

Suny Rodriguez, her husband and son crossed into the United States in 2015 after fleeing Honduras where they feared for their lives, the complaint said. The 41-year-old mother, and nine year old son, were released after four months in detention in Texas when an immigration judge ruled she was likely to be persecuted if she returned to Honduras. During those four months, the family members were held separately from the father.

During their detention, they were forced to sleep at times on the floor and with lights on, harassed by staff at night and held in crowded, wet and cold rooms, according to the lawsuit filed in federal court in Newark, New Jersey. The boy also suffers from asthma, according to the report.

The family was also prevented access to lawyers and kept in the dark as to the husband's whereabouts. The civil lawsuit comes as U.S. authorities struggle to contain a surge of migrants fleeing gang violence in Central America.

The Barack Obama administration recently announced a broad expansion of the program to let people fleeing violence in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala enter the United States as refugees. This is the first case to claim damages for treatment by refugees detained by ICE, according to Conchita Cruz, part of the family's legal team at the Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project at the New York-based Urban Justice Center.

If the case succeeds, "it will send a strong signal to immigration authorities to clean up their act," said Stephen Yale-Loehr, an immigration law professor at Cornell University in New York.

Rodriguez fled Honduras after receiving threats and physical abuse from police when she questioned the circumstances of the death of her mother, who had been a critic of police, and her stepfather, the complaint said. "The treatment I received in the detention centers was worse."

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