

Amnesty International warns COVID-19 disastrous for U.S.-detained migrants



New York, April 8 (RHC)-- The risk that the new coronavirus poses to the people detained in the large migration centers in the U.S. will have disastrous consequences if not addressed without delay, Amnesty International warned in a report released Tuesday.

"The United States has confirmed more cases of COVID-19 than any other country in the world, yet ICE continues to fail to adopt effective measures to prevent the pandemic in immigration centers across the country, putting everyone's safety in peril," Americas director at Amnesty International, Erika Guevara-Rosas said in a press statement.

Amnesty's report entitled "We Are Adrift, About to Sink: The looming COVID-19 disaster in U.S. immigration detention facilities" came one week after ICE said there were confirmed cases of COVID-19 at six of its detention installations.

The report recalls that even before the pandemic, ICE had "a well-documented history of gross medical negligence in its facilities," urging the agency to parole detainees and immediately release all children from custody.

Among the problems pointed out in the report are the failure of the agency to provide migrants and refugees adequate sanitation, hygiene, and the possibility of social distancing. It also rebukes the agency for the transfer of detainees without quarantine time.

Fear and despair are taking hold of the people detained in ICE centers across the U.S. as the coronavirus is continuing to spread.

"We are adrift, about to sink, because if there is one person to be infected, in our unit we would all perish," said a migration detainee on hunger strike at the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, Washington.

"We see how guards don't have the most minimum idea of what safety or medical care means. Here, all of us are going to pay the consequences," the detainee said.

Another detainee with chronic respiratory and heart problems told Vice that if "It (the COVID-19) hit here, a lot of people with underlying situations like me; we won't make it."

"There isn't any type of medical care in this prison," another detainee said. "If that sickness lands here, this will be a graveyard."

Thousands of health professionals, lawyers, and activists urged the ICE to release migrants starting with those who could be subject to complications from COVID-19.

In some cases, ICE has freed small groups of detainees in response to orders from federal courts. But the vast majority of the more than 35,000 people in ICE detention are still imprisoned in facilities identical to prisons.

"ICE's unnecessary detention of tens of thousands of people poses a massive threat to public health," said Guevara-Rosas who added that the agency "must urgently provide alternatives to detention and grant humanitarian parole to immigration detainees except in the most extraordinary of circumstances requiring ongoing detention."

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