

Human Rights First

Discrimination, Detention, and Deportation: Immigration & Refugees

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Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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Areas of Focus

Current Initiatives

Washington, D.C. Human Rights First today said that new record-high immigration detention numbers signal that the Obama Administration should immediately abandon its policy of detaining families and asylum seekers. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) today announced that the number of individuals held in detention exceeds 42,000.

The Obama Administration is operating a costly, inhumane, and unnecessary mass detention system, which as we've seen today has spun completely out of control. International human rights and refugee protection laws allow for detention only in limited circumstances. The administration's current policy, which is based on deterrence and blanket policies that have led to the mass detention of asylum seekers, clearly violates these obligations, said Human Rights First's **Olga Byrne**.

It was also reported today that the funding for detaining and monitoring immigrants is likely to run out by mid-November. The news comes as the Department of Homeland Security's Advisory Committee finalizes recommendations that call on the administration to stop detaining children and their families, and to cease placing asylum seeking families in expedited removal proceedings.

Human Rights First notes that much of the increase in detention is due to the administration's policy of detaining and often not releasing asylum seekers. Earlier this year Human Rights First released a [analysis](#) finding that asylum seekers and immigrants detained in Georgia are often held for long periods of time and face a near-moratorium on parole, despite a national directive from ICE setting out clear criteria for release. Other ICE field offices similarly disregard a 2009 asylum parole directive, which was issued by the Obama Administration, and have taken the position that asylum seekers are a top enforcement priority under Secretary Johnson's November 2014 memorandum, extending detention for many months even when asylum seekers meet the relevant parole or release criteria.

The Obama Administration must take steps to significantly reform its immigration detention policy, which has left thousands of asylum seekers in prolonged detention, noted Byrne. The administration should immediately move to eliminate unnecessary detention and, in cases where individual assessments indicate a need for appearance support, implement more cost-effective and just tools, such as community-based case management programs.

A broad array of voices have called on the administration to end the practice of detaining families, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Bar Association, Catholic and Lutheran Bishops, and 178 members of Congress and 35 senators.

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