

## **Sexual Abuse Reported at an Immigration Center**

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### **Body**

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The Justice Department is investigating complaints from women held at an immigration detention center near Miami who said they had witnessed or were victims of sexual assaults by Immigration and Naturalization Service guards.

While the latest investigation of the center, the Krome Service Processing Center, began last month, lawyers and advocates for immigrants, as well as some employees of the center, have been expressing concerns about abuse of detainees and corruption for years.

The more recent accusations came in a report released on Tuesday in New York by the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, an international advocacy group.

Basing its conclusions on statements from former guards and female refugees, the commission said the immigration service had effectively lost control of Krome, allowing it to become a place where many women lived in constant fear of sexual violence or harassment.

Some women told the commission in interviews last month that guards had promised to have them released in exchange for sex or to have them deported if they resisted. Some who had complained said they were punished or threatened.

The Justice Department inquiry involves the United States attorney's office in Miami, the Bureau of Prisons and the department's inspector general.

"This is an ongoing assessment of Krome, looking at what's wrong down there and what we can do to improve the situation," said Gretchen Michael, a Justice Department spokeswoman.

Ms. Michael said the investigation would focus on possible criminal activities as well as management of the center.

Maria Cordona, an immigration service spokeswoman in Washington, said immigration officials welcomed the investigation.

"The assessment was initiated," Ms. Cordona said, "because of all these allegations and because we realized that, while we tried to the extent we could to address them, we needed help."

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Those detained at Krome -- 472 men and 97 women -- include immigrants who are seeking political asylum as well as those who are fighting deportation.

The investigation has already led to some arrests and disciplinary actions against Krome employees.

A federal grand jury in Miami last month charged a guard with raping a transsexual detainee who was being held while her asylum request was being considered. A second employee has pleaded guilty to accepting a \$1,000 bribe to let a detainee use a cell phone.

Several other employees have been moved out of the Krome center, immigration officials said. But the women's commission report said many others accused of abusing women were still at their posts.

The 20-year-old detention center, about 25 miles south of Miami, has been the subject of numerous investigations and Congressional inquiries over its treatment of immigrants.

Wendy Young, director of government relations at the women's commission, said she was skeptical of the government's commitment to cleaning up Krome.

"I am concerned, partly based on the track record thus far at Krome, where we have seen abuses reported and very little if anything done in terms of disciplinary or legal action," Ms. Young said. "The Justice Department has to make detention a priority, and one way is to hold guards responsible."

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