



American Friends Service Committee

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“Dignity, Not Detention” Campaign Launched to Halt Expansion of the U.S. Immigration Detention System

People of Faith and Immigrant Rights groups Demand President Obama take immediate action to stop human rights abuses occurring under the U.S. enforcement and detention regime

February 25, 2010—Today, the American Friends Service Committee’s (AFSC) New Jersey and Colorado offices join people across the nation in launching a new campaign, “Dignity, Not Detention: Preserving Human Rights and Restoring Justice”. On Monday, March 1st we will launch the Colorado campaign at the GEO immigrant detention center in Aurora. Over the last eleven months, hundreds of people have participated in interfaith vigils at the GEO immigrant detention center in Aurora asking for an end to unjust detention.

The “Dignity, Not Detention” campaign is a national effort led by the Detention Watch Network to call for an end to immigration enforcement and detention expansion and to expose the profit-driven expansion of the detention system as a key contributor to the unprecedented number of immigrants held in ICE custody today.

The launch included more than 30 groups across the country demanding a reduction in government spending on detention, the use of cost-saving alternatives, and the restoration of due process in the government’s enforcement of immigration laws.

Over 300,000 immigrants a year are detained in a secretive web of 350 private, federal, state and local jails, and prisons at an annual cost of more than \$1.7 billion to taxpayers. Over eighty percent of detained immigrants go through the immigration system with no lawyer. Immigrants can be detained for months or years without any meaningful judicial review of whether they should be released. While detained, immigrants face horrific prison conditions, including mistreatment by guards, solitary confinement, the denial of medical attention and limited or no access to their families, lawyers and the outside world. In many cases, these conditions have proven fatal: since 2003, a reported 107 people have died in immigration custody.

John Morton, the head of Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) recently announced that he plans to institute major reforms in the detention system, yet to date advocates say there is little evidence of change. “The Obama administration has detained more immigrants in the last year than the Bush administration did the year before. We see more and more community members being picked up through traffic stops and by ICE at their home in the middle of the night. Many of them have lived here five, ten, twenty years and are needed in our community. On top of this

the administration still has not enacted enforceable detention standards or transparent rules for who is held in detention and who is released”, said **Jennifer Piper of the American Friends Service Committee**.

Immigrants who have been detained at the center continue to raise concerns as well. **Rosa**, a mother and community leader who has no criminal charges, explained “during the month and a half I was held I was transferred to a county jail and then back to GEO, the food was terrible, the cots we slept on no thicker than your finger, and I had no access to a lawyer or any legal services. Thank God my daughter was able to raise the funds to hire a lawyer, but many of the other women were not so lucky.”

“This Monday’s interfaith vigil at GEO will highlight the literal and emotional deaths caused by our broken policies, on the border, in detention, and in our communities” states **Heidi Parish of No More Deaths Denver**. “We invite the community to come, pray, sing and stand in solidarity with those detained. Get involved in the campaign to preserve human rights and restore justice to our system”.

Coordinated actions in support of the national campaign occurred across the country in cities including Gainesville, Phoenix, San Antonio, New York, Newark, Chicago and Los Angeles. For more information, visit www.dignitynotdetention.org.

**WHAT: Interfaith Vigil and Rally to launch “Dignity not Detention” national campaign
Immigrant Testimony, Facts about Detention in Colorado, Prayer, Song**

WHEN: March 1st, 2010 6:00-7:00pm

WHERE: 30th Avenue and Peoria Street

WHO: This month’s vigil is sponsored by No More Deaths Denver and the American Friends Service Committee. Supporting congregations and groups include Members of Comunidad Liberación, 10:30 Catholic Community, St. Andrews’ United Methodist Church, Iglesia del Cristo El Shaddai, Grey Robed Monks of St Benedict, Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ, Comite Defensa del Pueblo, Rights for All People, Coloradans for Immigrant Rights

*The **American Friends Service Committee** carries out service, development, social justice, and peace programs throughout the world. Founded by Quakers in 1917 to provide conscientious objectors with an opportunity to aid civilian war victims, AFSC's work attracts the support and partnership of people of many races, religions, and cultures. AFSC's work is based on the Quaker belief in the worth of every person and faith in the power of love to overcome violence and injustice. The work of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) in immigrant communities is based on our belief in the worth and inherent dignity of every person. For more information go to <http://www.afsc.org/denver/>*

*The **Detention Watch Network** is a national coalition of organization (including AFSC) and individuals working to educate the public and policy makers about the U.S. immigration detention and deportation system and advocate for humane reform so that all who come to our shores receive fair and humane treatment. The DWN members active in these events are*

speaking on behalf of themselves or their organizations. For more information visit
www.detentionwatchnetwork.org

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