

The Guardian



500 detained fathers and sons to go on strike after being separated

Families separated in Texas for weeks and months will refuse food and participation in school activities

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More than 500 migrant fathers and sons detained in Texas after being separated from each other for weeks and months have launched a strike against unfair conditions.

The fathers plan to resist orders and refuse food at three sites at Karnes detention center, while the sons are set to refuse to participate in school activities.

The demonstrators are asking US officials to expedite their immigration cases because of the “unjust” conditions they face.

The nonprofit Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (Raices) shared the strike plan with news media, including audio of interviews with affected fathers.

Olivio, a Guatemalan migrant detained at the border on 13 May, said he was told he would only be separated from his son for a few days, but they were apart for two months, according to a transcript provided by Raices.

“We are planning a hunger strike tomorrow at this detention center because we don’t know anything,” Olivio said. “We are incarcerated in here and there not much we can do so now we are all planning to gather in the patio and wait to see what happens.”

Raices advocates, like others working in migrant detention centers, are concerned fathers were coerced into accepting deportation orders instead of being allowed to pursue justified asylum claims. These fathers have told Raices they want to pursue their cases in court.

“The situation at Karnes today is one of the worst I’ve seen in my 12 years of practicing law,” said Manoj Govindaiah, Raices’ director of family detention services, in a statement. “The trauma caused by their separations has forced these fathers into untenable positions of fear, anger, and despair. That these families feel the need to strike shows how tired they are of the games the administration continues to play with vulnerable communities.”

Raices said Immigration and Customs Enforcement has not given the group a list of detainees or their immigration case status. But government officials have said Karnes is being used to temporarily hold families facing imminent deportation, according to court documents.

“There are approximately 500 families here, and everyone is desperate to get out here,” said another father, Jorge, in audio provided by Raices.

Jorge traveled to the border from Honduras and said he was separated from his son for more than two months. He said all the detainees are sad and frustrated with being held for so long. Jorge said: “There are children crying and saying they want to leave this place.”

Immigrants in California say they are also being treated unfairly, according to a lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) on Wednesday.

The suit alleges that immigrants transferred to facilities operated by the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) are unable to practice their religious beliefs, do not have adequate access to mental health and medical care and suffer verbal abuse.

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