



August 26, 2020

The Honorable Joseph V. Cuffari
DHS Inspector General
Office of Inspector General/Mail Stop 0305
or gue - r

M

Officer Cameron Quinn
Officer for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Compliance Branch, Mail Stop #0190
2707 Martin Luther King, Jr. Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20528-0190
Sent via USPS and email to: CRCLCompliance@hq.dhs.gov

Re: Call for an Immediate Halt to and Investigation of Detention, Violence, Repression and Racism Against Peacefully Protesting Cameroonian and Black Asylum Seekers, and other Asylum Seekers, at Pine Prairie ICE Processing Center; and the release of all Black Hunger Strikers from Solitary Confinement

Dear Inspector General Cuffari and Officer Quinn:

We write to request that the Office of Inspector General immediately halt and investigate the use of force and solitary confinement against peaceful protesters at Pine Prairie ICE Processing Center (“Pine Prairie”), in Pine Prairie, Louisiana. Asylum seekers held by ICE have been peacefully protesting their indefinite and inhumane detention, the conditions of detention, and discriminatory treatment. Based on our interviews of eyewitnesses and victims, we believe that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”) and its contractor, the Geo Group, responded with unlawful force, improperly interfered with protected speech, and continue to do so in the face of renewed protests. We especially want to highlight the violence against Cameroonian and other Black protesters, as they have led hunger strikes, and lifted their voices to join the call that “Black Lives ICE

that you conduct a
quickly as possible.

onian asylum-seekers
rch of 2020 and was

August 26, 2020

and conditions of confinement; blanket parole denials, particularly to Cameroonians and other Black applicants; across-the-board failure to respond to *pro se* parole applications; false promises and statements from ICE regarding the sincerity of their custody reviews; and the inhumanity of being imprisoned during a global pandemic. In response to their peaceful protest action of refusal to eat, officials responded by stating that the peaceful protesters were to be placed in what Pine Prairie calls “Echo” or “Seg,” which the ICE Performance Based National Detention standards calls “Special Management Units” or “SMU,” known more plainly as solitary confinement. Some of the strikers sat on the floor, others held their hands above their heads to show their peaceful intention. In retaliation, fifteen guards mobilized with tear gas cannisters, a tear gas gun, pepper spray, and handcuffs. Without any provt

M é e

August 26, 2020

Indefinite Detention

The group of Black asylum-seekers currently on strike are being indefinitely detained by ICE at a rate much higher than other populations, a central reason for their protest against the stated racism inherent in the

August 26, 2020

Freedom of Speech

Further, the First Amendment prohibits ICE from abridging freedom of speech.¹⁶ Insofar as ICE has prohibited outside communication

August 26, 2020

In the name of integrity and accountability, we again urge you to investigate and remedy the above-detailed incidents of racism and violence against detained Black immigrants at Pine Prairie ICE Processing Center, and all incidents of violence which we, our partner organizations, and the press have identified by ICE against the human beings in its care here in Louisiana.

If the hunger strikers are not returned from Echo immediately, further action will be necessary.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Cameroon American Council
Freedom for Immigrants
ISLA: Immigration Services and Legal Advocacy
Southern Poverty Law Center

Cc:

FOD Diane Witte
Interim Field Office Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
1250 Poydras Street, Suite 325
New Orleans, LA 70113

Sent via email to: diane.l.witte@ice.dhs.gov; NewOrleans.Outreach@ice.dhs.gov

Warden Eric Staiger
Geo Group
Pine Prairie ICE Processing Center
1133 Hampton Dupre Rd.
Pine Prairie, LA 70576

Sent via email to: estaiger@geogroup.com

Direct responses to:

Rose Murray, Direct Services Attorney, Southern Poverty Law Center (rose.murray@splcenter.org)

Sofia Casini, Director of Visitation Advocacy Strategies, Freedom For Immigrants
(scasini@freedomforimmigrants.org)

Sylvie Qwasinwi Ngassa Bello, Founder/CEO, Cameroon American Council
(cameroon.american.council@gmail.com)

Homero López, Executive Director, ISLA (hlopez@islaimmigration.org)