

Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Vigil Calls for Closure of Raymondville's Notorious "Tent City" Detention Center

Texas Organizations Call on ICE to Use Alternatives to Detention

RAYMONDVILLE, TX – On Friday, October 16th, organizations from across Texas will hold a vigil for the 4,200 immigrants held in detention in the Rio Grande Valley, and call for the closure of the controversial Willacy County Detention Center in Raymondville, Texas. The Willacy County Detention Center, a private prison operated by Utah-based Management and Training Corporation and partially constructed of Kevlar tents, is the nation's largest immigrant detention center.

Protesters will gather for the vigil at the Willacy County Detention Center in Raymondville, Texas from 5-7pm on Friday, October 16th.

Organizers will call on the Obama administration, specifically Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano and ICE chief John Morton to close the Tent City detention center and stop ICE's overuse of private detention centers.

Alternatives to detention tend to be both more humane and less costly. A Vera Institute study found that more than 90% of immigrants on a supervised release program attended their immigration hearings. The average cost of a supervision program is \$12 a day compared with more than \$30 a day ICE pays MTC to detainee immigrants at Tent City.

"We were heartened by the announcement earlier this month that ICE is looking at reforming its detention system," said Bob Libal of Grassroots Leadership. "ICE can take a first step towards that goal by closing this Tent City detention center, and releasing detainees into more humane, less costly alternatives to detention."

The vigil draws attention to the plight of more than 3,000 immigrants held in detention at the Willacy County Center and more than 1,800 detainees held at the Port Isabel Detention Center nearby. The PIDC detainees have been on rolling hunger strike for several months protesting prolonged detention and conditions inside the detention center.

Rama Carty, a detainee who was held at PIDC, has spoken out about conditions

in Texas detention centers, saying: "I have conversations with people where I am in custody every day about what is going on in South Texas. I strongly believe that the Rio Grande Valley is at the forefront of numerous humanitarian issues which must be addressed in order to accelerate the evolution of people on this planet."

The Willacy County Detention Center has been racked by a series of allegations of horrendous conditions and abuse, including alleged sexual assaults on female detainees by guards, reports of detainees being fed rotten and inadequate food, and poor access to medical and mental health care.

"We have lived with the militarization of our border for long enough. Government oversight has failed to recognize human rights and enforced a sub-human category for immigrants," said Anayanse Garza with the Southwest Worker's Union. "We believe that shutting down the "Tent City" Detention Center in Raymondville and the Port Isabel Detention Center are essential for progress in recognizing Human Rights in our border community."

The vigil is sponsored by the Southwest Workers Union, Grassroots Leadership, Coalition of Amigos in Solidarity & Action (CASA), La Union del Pueblo Entero, Proyecto Libertad, Texans United for Families, Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera, ACLU of Texas, American Friends Service Committee - Austin, Border Ambassadors, and Texas Indigenous Council. Protesters are expected to join caravans from Austin, San Antonio, and throughout the Rio Grande Valley.

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