

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

News Releases

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ICE -- a proven track record as the prevailing agency investigating human rights violations

Over the past century, the world has seen an endless string of violent conflicts resulting in the death, mutilation, rape, disappearance and displacement of millions of innocent men, women and children. The victims of these conflicts are often persecuted based on race, religion, ethnic background or political ideologies. Although some perpetrators are arrested and held accountable in the countries in which their crimes were committed, many are not. Instead, human rights violators routinely evade prosecution and punishment for their actions. Escaping from their home countries, they assume new identities and exploit the immigration laws of nations who welcome refugees. They blend into their new societies, hide amongst their victims, and live with impunity in our communities.

ICE's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) is the largest investigative wing of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). HSI is responsible for ensuring that perpetrators of war crimes, genocide, torture and other gross human rights abuses do not evade justice and accountability for their crimes by hiding in the United States. Over the past several years, ICE/ HSI has repeatedly demonstrated the agency's unique ability to identify, investigate, prosecute and remove some of the world's most brutal human rights violators and notorious war criminals.

The agency's efforts in this arena are spearheaded by the [Human Rights Violators and War Crimes Unit \(HRVWCU\)](#) (http://www.ice.gov/investigations/national_security/hrv.htm), a specialized unit of highly dedicated, skilled agents, intelligence officers, analysts, criminal research specialists, historians, and prosecutors. Based in Washington, D.C., the HRVWCU coordinates and oversees the two primary missions of the investigative program:



1. To identify, investigate, prosecute, and where applicable, to remove human rights violators in the U.S.; and
2. To prevent individuals involved in the commission of human rights violations from entering and obtaining safe haven in the United States.

ICE's unique set of federal authorities stems from its role as the primary U.S. federal law enforcement agency charged with investigating the illicit movement of people, goods and money across U.S. borders. ICE uses these authorities to investigate violations of federal criminal law including customs and immigration offenses, as well as violations of law under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). As a result, ICE has one of the most wide-ranging sets of investigative authorities amongst U.S. federal law enforcement agencies. These various authorities have proven to be an invaluable asset when investigating human rights violators. Since ICE launched its No Safe Haven Initiative in 2004, ICE led-investigations have resulted in the arrests of approximately 200 suspected human rights violators. Criminal violations include visa/passport fraud, false statements, perjury and torture resulting in sentences ranging from six months to 97 years in U.S. federal prison.

A recent example of the use of ICE's various legal authorities is evident in the case of Chuckie Taylor, an American citizen and the son of former Liberian president Charles Taylor. During the course of a multi-year investigation into American citizens involved in arms trafficking to West Africa, a violation of U.S. arms export control laws, ICE agents learned that Chuckie Taylor planned to travel to the U.S. In March 2006, ICE agents arrested Taylor for making a false statement on his U.S. passport application. This arrest was the result of an international investigation, initiated and led by ICE, that included the assistance of the FBI and the Department of Justice. Based on the investigation, the U.S. Attorney's Office charged Chuckie Taylor with five counts of torture, conspiracy to torture and two federal firearm offenses for his role in the torture and murder of several victims in Liberia during his father's regime. Taylor was convicted of all counts and was sentenced to 97 years in federal prison. What began as an investigation using ICE's authorities ultimately resulted in the first use of the federal torture statute since its enactment in 1994.

In addition to its criminal authorities, ICE uses its administrative authority under the INA to investigate and prosecute human rights abusers. ICE uses administrative charges such as genocide, torture or extrajudicial killing to hold human rights violators accountable even if there are no viable criminal charges. In many instances, administrative charges are used to ensure a suspected human rights violator's return to face charges in his or her home country. Since 2004, ICE has successfully removed over 300 known or suspected human rights abusers from the United States.



Under the agency's Human Rights Target Tracking Initiative, ICE's agents, criminal research specialists, and intelligence officers work with their domestic and international counterparts to identify serious foreign human rights abusers and to prevent them from seeking safe haven in the U.S. Since formally undertaking this initiative in June 2008, ICE has been instrumental in preventing the successful admission of over 40 human rights violators or war crimes suspects.

An instrumental part of ICE's investigations of human rights violators are

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the designated ICE agents assigned to field offices around the U.S. and to the ICE Attaché Offices around the globe. These agents travel around the world to identify and interview witnesses and gather evidence to support

their investigations. They travel to countries and regions devastated by war, operating in difficult environments without running water, electricity or paved roads. They visit torture chambers, prison camps, military bases and other buildings where atrocities have been committed. In doing so, these agents put ICE in a position to present evidence to prosecutors to ensure perpetrators of human rights violations do not go unpunished for their actions.

The success of ICE agents in conducting investigations into human rights violators can probably be best highlighted by the cases they've worked, a small portion of which are summarized below:

- In 2004, ICE agents in Boston arrested Marko Boskic, a Bosnian Serb national who personally participated in the mass execution of approximately 8,000 Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica in July 1995, as part of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. Boskic was charged and convicted for fraud and false statements, and sentenced to five years in U.S. federal prison. Upon the completion of his prison term, Boskic was deported to Sarajevo where he was charged with crimes against humanity. He subsequently pled guilty and was sentenced in July 2010 to 10 years in prison.
- In 2006, ICE agents in Wisconsin arrested Nejdó Ikoníc, a former commander of a Special Police company of the Republika Srpska whose unit participated in the 1995 capture and killing of hundreds of Bosnian prisoners. In 2008, Ikoníc was sentenced to 12 months in prison. Following completion of his sentence, he was removed to Bosnia and Herzegovina in April 2010 where he is detained pending trial.
- In 2007, ICE agents in Virginia arrested Ernesto Barreiro, an Argentinean national who served as a chief interrogator at a clandestine torture facility during Argentina's Dirty War in the 1970s and 1980s. Barreiro pled guilty to visa fraud in the U.S. and was subsequently deported to Argentina.
- In 2007, ICE agents in Florida arrested Ricardo Hurtado-Hurtado, a Lieutenant in the Peruvian Army who, in 1985, ordered soldiers in his command to kill 69 men, women and children in a remote mountain village. Hurtado-Hurtado was convicted of visa fraud in U.S. court. He remains in custody pending his extradition to Peru to face additional charges related to the 1985 massacre.
- In 2008, ICE agents in Boston, in collaboration with the Department of Justice, obtained criminal convictions of Carlos de Graca Lopes, a former prison director in Cape Verde. Lopes was convicted of 13 counts of visa fraud, false statements and perjury for failing to disclose acts of torture committed at his prison in Cape Verde. Lopes is currently serving his three-year sentence in U.S. federal prison.

ICE has made it a priority to use its authorities and expertise to deny human rights violators safe haven in the United States. By doing so, ICE has ensured that perpetrators of war crimes, torture, genocide and other atrocities are not given the opportunity to live among their victims, in our neighborhoods and within our borders, in relative obscurity. ICE has worked tirelessly to identify these violators, and in collaboration with other federal and international partners, to hold them accountable for the actions they committed.

[Read more about successful ICE human rights violators cases](http://www.ice.gov/pi/news/factsheets/hrvc1.htm)
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