November 28, 2012

President Barack Obama The White House 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW Washington, DC 20500

#### Dear President Obama,

There is an ongoing crisis in the U.S. immigration detention system: immigrants detained under the custody of the U.S. government are languishing in a system so massive and mismanaged that it has led to rampant due process and human rights abuses. The system exacts a grim emotional, physical and financial toll on immigrant communities at the taxpayers' expense.

In October 2009, your Administration acknowledged that our immigration detention system was plagued with injustice and inefficiency and promised sweeping reform. Three years later, while there have been efforts to improve the system, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) continues to detain more than 400,000 immigrants a year in prisons and jails across the country where they are subject to punitive treatment, inadequate medical care, vulnerable to rape and assault, and isolated from any access to legal assistance.

We commend your commitment to substantive change, but after three years of effort by your Administration the reality for people in detention has not improved and the suffering continues. The number of detention beds has skyrocketed and more people are experiencing this inhumane system than ever before. Immigrants in detention continue to be denied basic needs, such as contact with lawyers and loved ones, inadequate food and hygiene, and access to fresh air and sunlight. They continue to get injured, sick, and die without timely medical care. They continue to endure racial slurs and discriminatory treatment by prison staff. These conditions are unacceptable and not in the spirit of your promised reforms.

Every day, those who suffer in detention, and their families and communities who suffer with them, wait for accountability for the violations that have already occurred and wait for laws and policies that treat individuals in detention in accordance with basic human dignity. After three years of waiting, we, the undersigned civil and human rights organizations, call on you to act on your convictions of fairness and justice by taking immediate steps to close *at least ten* facilities that advocates have identified as among the worst of immigration detention facilities across the country.

While the closure of any facility where immigrants are being held by ICE would be welcome, members and allies of the Detention Watch Network (DWN) have been working together to gather information about the facilities in their communities and, based on their findings, recommend that you terminate contracts with the following:

Etowah County Detention Center (AL)
Pinal County Jail (AZ)
Houston Processing Center (TX)
Polk County Jail (TX)
Stewart Detention Center (GA)

Irwin County Detention Center (GA) Hudson County Jail (NJ) Baker County Jail (FL) Theo Lacy Jail (CA) Tri-County Jail (IL)

These ten jails exemplify the egregious problems inherent throughout the immigration detention system. Reports on each of these facilities, released today as part of DWN's Expose and Close Campaign, describe the inhumane conditions that immigrants experience in ICE custody. (<a href="https://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/exposeandclose">www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/exposeandclose</a>)

# Illustrative examples include:

- Roberto Medina-Martinez, a 39-year-old immigrant, died at Stewart in March 2009 of a treatable heart infection. An investigation conducted following his death revealed that the nursing staff failed to refer Mr. Medina for timely medical treatment and the facility physician failed to follow internal oversight procedures.
- A man with serious emotional health problems in the Houston Processing Center in Texas was placed in solitary confinement for months at a time, a practice which the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture has deemed torture.
- At Hudson County Jail, an HIV positive woman was not receiving any medication until a local NGO intervened.
- At Pinal County Jail complaints regarding sanitation include receiving food on dirty trays, worms found in food, bugs and worms found in the faucets, receiving dirty laundry, and being overcrowded with ten other men in one cell and only one toilet.
- At Baker, Etowah and Pinal County Jails, families are only able to visit with their loved ones in detention through video monitors after having driven hundreds of miles to see them.
- At Theo Lacy, Baker County and at Hudson County Jails, people reported being insulted, being cursed and laughed at, and having their clothes and other possessions thrown on the floor by corrections officers.

This is to name just a few of the incidents of neglect, deprivations and indignities that immigrants in detention endure every day. Many of these problems are endemic throughout the system. At all ten of the of the facilities listed above, people reported waiting weeks or months

for medical care; inadequate, and in some cases a total absence, of any outdoor recreation time or access to sunlight or fresh air; inadequate and nutritionally lacking food; the use of solitary confinement as punishment; and the extraordinary difficulty that families face in trying to visit their loved ones often hundreds of miles away in detention. The remote location of many facilities also interferes dangerously with peoples' ability to get legal help to fight their cases. Perhaps the most universal refrain of immigrants in ICE detention is the fear that if they complain about their treatment or living conditions, they will provoke retaliation by guards, or a negative impact on their immigration case.

As disturbing as the conditions described in these ten reports are, they are only the tip of the iceberg. We know that for every reported incident, there are many more where the victims remain silent. Ultimately, the inhumane conditions and treatment at these facilities are too extreme, and too entrenched, to be addressed through the kinds of piecemeal reforms that ICE has tried to undertake in the past three years. Without any legally enforceable civil detention standards in place, and with no intention on ICE's part of creating or submitting to any such standards, immigration detention will remain an abuse-ridden system that cannot ensure humane treatment and access to justice. The level of suffering that incarcerated immigrants are experiencing in these facilities makes the situation too urgent for any solution short of closure.

Furthermore, the facilities highlighted here are not the exception, but the rule, in immigration detention today. It is unacceptable to be spending billions in taxpayer dollars every year to contract with corporations that perpetrate human rights abuses against this vulnerable population at a time of fiscal crisis.

We, therefore, call on you, President Obama, to exercise your authority to immediately terminate contracts with at least these ten facilities. Immigrants in these facilities should be released to their families and communities wherever possible. Use the considerable savings you will reap from no longer using these expensive prisons and jails to develop community-based programs that support people to appear for and participate meaningfully in their immigration hearings. For those subject to mandatory detention under our immigration laws, DWN members and allies have long argued that ICE can supervise those individuals in a community setting, without violating the terms of any statute.

We are hopeful that the Administration will permanently close at least these ten facilities. We also call on the Administration to fulfill our international obligations and your promise for humane and just treatment for everyone. Now is the time to implement these changes on the ground, and you have the power in your second term to make it happen. The safety, health and even the lives of thousands of immigrants, and the wellbeing of their families, depends on it.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical matter. For additional information, contact Emily Tucker, Director of Policy and Advocacy, Detention Watch Network at 202-350-9057.

Sincerely,

### **National Organizations**

All of Us or None (San Francisco, CA)
American Civil Liberties Union (Washington, DC)

American Immigration Council (Washington, DC)

American Immigration Lawyers Association (Washington, DC)

Americans for Immigrant Justice (Miami, FL)

Asian Law Caucus (San Francisco, CA)

Black Alliance for Just Immigration (Oakland, CA)

Breakthrough (New York, NY)

Center for Community Change (Washington, DC)

Code Pink (Cambridge, MA)

Community Justice Network For Youth (San Francisco, CA)

Critical Resistance (Oakland, CA)

Detention Watch Network (Washington, DC)

Fair Immigration Reform Movement (Washington, DC)

Family Equality Council (Washington, DC)

Friends Committee on National Legislation (Washington, D.C.)

Grassroots Leadership (Austin, TX)

Human Rights Defense Center (Brattleboro, VT)

Immigrant Defense Project (New York, NY)

Immigrant Legal Resource Center (San Francisco, CA)

International CURE (Washington, DC)

Justice Strategies (Brooklyn, NY)

Legal Services for Prisoners with Children (CA)

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (Baltimore, MD)

National Alliance for Filipino Concerns (San Francisco, CA)

National Alliance of Latin American & Caribbean Communities (Chicago, IL)

National Center for Transgender Equality (Washington, DC)

National Council of Jewish Women (Washington, DC)

National Day Laborer Organizing Network (Los Angeles, CA)

National Guestworker Alliance (New Orleans, LA)

National Immigrant Justice Center (Chicago, IL)

National Immigration Law Center (Los Angeles, CA)

National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild (Boston, MA)

National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health (Washington, DC)

National Lawyers Guild International Committee (New York, NY)

National Minority AIDS Council (Washington, DC)

National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (Oakland, CA)

National People's Action (Chicago, IL)

National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministry, The United Methodist Church (*Phoenix*, AZ)

Physicians for Human Rights (Cambridge, MA)

Prison Policy Initiative (Easthampton, MA)

Private Corrections Working Group (Tallahassee, FL)

Refugee Women's Network, Inc. (Decatur, GA)

Rights Working Group (Washington, DC)

Sisters of Mercy Institute Justice Team (Silver Spring, MD)

South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) (Takoma Park, MD)

Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC) (Washington, DC)

The Advocates for Human Rights (Minneapolis, MN)

The Episcopal Church (Washington, DC)

The Real Cost of Prisons Project (Northampton, MA)

United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society (Washington, DC)

United Methodist Women (New York, NY)

United We Dream (USA)

Women's Refugee Commission (Washington, DC)

Youth Justice Coalition (Los Angeles, CA)

### Regional, State and Local Organizations

African Services Committee (New York, NY)

Alterna (LaGrange, GA)

American Civil Liberties Union of Texas (Houston, TX)

American Civil Liberties Union of Arizona (Phoenix, AZ)

American Dream Community Agency (Houston, TX)

American Friends Service Committee, Miami Office (Miami, FL)

Amnesty International USA, Student Chapter, Abraham Lincoln High School (San Francisco, CA)

Arkansas Coalition for DREAM (De Queen, AR)

Arkansas Coalition for Peace and Justice (Little Rock, AR)

Arkansas Interfaith Alliance (Little Rock, AR)

Arkansas Voices for the Children Left Behind (Little Rock, AR)

Arlington LULAC Council (Arlington, TX)

Ascent Aviation Services Corporation (Tucson, AZ)

Assisting Latinos/Ayudando a Los Latinos (Logansport, IN)

Atlantans Building Leadership for Empowerment (ABLE) (Atlanta, GA)

Austin Immigrant Rights Coalition (Austin, TX)

Avuda (Washington, DC)

Bay Area Immigration Taskforce (Temple UMC) (San Francisco, CA)

Be the Bridge (Sunman, IN)

Benedictine Sisters of Baltimore (Lutherville, MD)

Berkshire Immigrant Center (Pittsfield, MA)

Black Mesa Indigenous Support (Flagstaff, AZ)

Blauvelt Dominican Sisters (New Rochelle, NY)

Border Action Network (Tucson, AZ)

Border Network for Human Rights (El Paso, TX)

Boston Mayday Coalition (Cambridge, MA)

Boston New Sanctuary Movement (Cambridge, MA)

Brandeis University's Schuster Institute of Investigative Journalism

Building Communities, Ending Violence (Chicago, IL)

Californians United for a Responsible Budget (Oakland, CA)

Cambridge United for Justice with Peace (Cambridge, MA)

Cante Wanjila Offender Reentry and Support Project (*Pine Ridge, SD*)

CAPOW—Citizens Act to Protect our Water (Evanston, IL)

CASA de Maryland, Inc. (Langley Park, MD)

Casa De Proyecto Libertad (Harlingen, TX)

Casa Del Inmigrante (Fort Worth, TX)

Casa Esperanza (Plainfield & Bound Brook, NJ)

Catholic Charities of Arkansas (Little Rock, AR)

Causa Oregon (Bend, OR)

Central Valley DREAM Team (Fresno, CA)

CEO Pipe Organs/Golden Ponds Farm (Delafield, WI)

Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression (CAARPR) (Chicago, IL)

Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers (CLAIM) (Chicago, IL)

CHISPAS (Gainesville, FL)

Church of Our Saviour/La Iglesia de Nuestro Salvador Episcopal (Cincinnati, OH)

Citizens with Conviction (Champaign, IL)

Coalicion de Lideres Latinos-CLILA (Dalton, GA)

Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) (Los Angeles, CA)

Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking (Los Angeles, CA)

Cobb Immigrant Alliance (Austell, GA)

Collaborative Center for Justice, Inc. (Hartford, CT)

College Heights United Church of Christ (San Mateo, CA)

Collier County Neighborhood Stories Project (Naples, FL)

Colorado-CURE (Denver, CO)

Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition (Denver, CO)

Community Church of NY Unitarian Universalist (New York, NY)

Community to Community (Bellingham, WA)

Comunidad Liberación/Liberation Community (Denver, CO)

Congregation of St. Joseph (Cincinnati, OH)

Congress of Day Laborers (New Orleans, LA)

Crosscultural Now (Eugene, OR)

DC Trans Coalition (Washington, DC)

El Cambio (Yadkinville, NC)

El Centro Comunitario Mexicano (Dallas, TX)

El Refugio Ministry (Lumpkin, GA)

El Zócalo Immigrant Resource Center (Little Rock, AR)

Ella Baker Center for Human Rights (Oakland, CA)

Enlace (Portland, OR)

Episcopal Network for Economic Justice (Kent, WA)

Families & Allies of Virginia's Youth (Arlington, VA)

Families for Freedom (New York, NY)

Fanm Ayisyen Nan Miyami, Inc. (F.A.N.M.)/Haitian Women of Miami (Miami, FL)

Farmworker Association of Florida (Apopka, FL)

Filipino Advocates for Justice (Oakland, CA)

Florida Immigrant Coalition (Miami, FL)

Forks Human Rights (Group Forks, WA)

Gamaliel (Chicago, IL)

Georgia Detention Watch (Atlanta, GA)

Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights (Atlanta, GA)

Georgia Peace & Justice Coalition/Atlanta (Atlanta, GA)

Georgia Rural Urban Summit (Decatur, GA)

Gibbs Houston Pauw (Seattle, WA)

Grupo Cajola in Morristown (Morristown, NJ)

H.S. Power & Light Ministries - Latino Faith Initiative (Denver, CO)

Houston United/Unido (Houston, TX)

Human Rights Center of Chapel Hill & Carrboro (Carrboro, NC)

Iglesia Luterana Manantial de Vida (Columbia, SC)

Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (Chicago, IL)

Immigrant Family Advocates (Bend, OR)

Immigrants Initiative for the Fostering of Shared Prosperity (Houston, TX)

Immigration task force of mission presbytery (San Antonio, TX)

Immigration Task Force of Unitarian Universalists of San Mateo (San Mateo, CA)

Independent Catholic Church (Ormond Beach, FL)

Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center (Seattle, WA)

Interfaith Coalition on Immigration (Minneapolis, MN)

Interfaith Committee for Detained Immigrants (Chicago, IL)

Interfaith Solidarity of Oregon and Southwest Washington (Portland, OR)

IRATE & First Friends (Elizabeth, NJ)

Just Communities of Arkansas (Little Rock, AR)

Kino Border Initiative (Nogales, AZ)

Kitsap Immigrant Assistance Center (Silverdale, WA)

La Sonrisa Productions (Austin, TX)

Lake Kandiyohi Association Lake (Lillian, MN)

Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center (El Paso, TX)

Latin America Taskforce, River Road UU Congregation (Bethesda, MD)

Latin America/Caribbean Committee of Loretto Community (Pacifica, CA)

Latin American Coalition (Fort Pierce, FL)

Latino Advocacy Coalition (Hendersonville, NC)

Latino and Latina Roundtable (San Dimas, CA)

Law Office of Arturo J. Viscarra (Washington, DC)

Legal Services for Children (San Francisco, CA)

Long Beach Immigrant Rights Coalition (Long Beach, CA)

Long Island Immigrant Alliance (Amityville, NY)

Loretto Community (St. Louis, MO)

Los Amigos OF O.C. (Anaheim, CA)

LULAC Council 4721(Taylor, TX)

LULAC District 21 (Euless, TX)

Maria Baldini-Potermin & Associates, PC (Chicago, IL)

May 1st Coalition of CA (Stockton, CA)

Meadowlark Center (Newton, KS)

Miami Workers Center (Miami, FL)

Minnesotans for Humane Immigration Policy (Inver Grove Heights, MN)

MIRA Coalition (Boston, MA)

Moriah's Gift (*Powder Springs, GA*)

Movimiento Migrante Mesoamericano (South Pasadena, CA)

Mujeres Unidas y Activas (San Francisco, CA)

Munoz Rios Consulting (Porterville, CA)

National Council of Jewish Women, California Chapter (Sacramento, CA)

National Council of Jewish Women, (West Hollywood, CA)

National Council of Jewish Women, (San Francisco, CA)

National Council of Jewish Women, Chicago/North Shore Section (Wilmette, IL)

National Council of Jewish Women, Concordia Section (Monroe Township, NJ)

National Council of Jewish Women, Contra Costa County (Walnut Creek, CA)

National Council of Jewish Women, Los Angeles Section (Los Angeles, CA)

National Council of Jewish Women, Peninsula Section (Lawrence, NY)

National Council of Jewish Women, State Policy Advocate Chair (Providence, RI)

National Council of Jewish Women, Atlanta Section (Atlanta, GA)

National Council of Jewish Women, Bergen co. NJ Section (Bergenfield, NJ)

National Council of Jewish Women, Long Beach Section (Long Beach, CA)

National Council of Jewish Women, Michigan State Policy Advocacy Chair (Southfield, MI)

National Council of Jewish Women, New Jersey State Policy Advocacy Chair (West Orange, N.J.)

National Council of Jewish Women, Peninsula Section (Lynbrook, NY)

National Council of Jewish Women, Pennsylvania State Policy Advocacy Chair (Pittsburgh, PA)

National Council of Jewish Women, Texas State Policy Advocacy Co- Chair (Austin, TX)

National Council of Jewish Women, Union County (NJ) Section (Elizabeth, NJ)

National Council of Jewish Women/Kendall Section (Miami, FL)

National Lawyers Guild, Los Angeles Chapter (Pasadena, CA)

National Organization for Women, Miracle Mile LA Chapter (Los Angeles, CA)

New Hampshire Alliance for Immigrants and Refugees (Manchester, NH)

New Jersey Civil Rights Defense Committee (Somerset, NJ)

New Orleans Worker's Center for Racial Justice (New Orleans, LA)

New Sanctuary Coalition of NYC (New York, NY)

New York Immigration Coalition (New York, NY)

North Carolina Council of Churches (Raleigh, NC)

North Texas Dream Team (Dallas-Fort Worth, TX)

Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights (New York, NY)

Northwest Arkansas Workers' Justice Center (Springdale, AR)

Oakhurst Presbyterian Church (Decatur, GA)

One Horizon Institute (Lexington, KY)

OneAmerica (Seattle, WA)

Operation Welcome Home (Madison, WI)

Oregon New Sanctuary Movement (Portland, OR)

Orlando YAYA (Orlando, FL)

Our Developing World (Saratoga, CA)

Palm Beach County Coalition for Immigration Rights (Greenacres, FL)

Pangea Legal Services (San Francisco, CA)

Parents and Youth in Action (*Phoenix*, AZ)

Pax Christi Austin (Austin, TX)

Pax Christi Metrowest (MA) (Natick, MA)

Peace Action of San Mateo County (San Mateo, CA)

People's Advocacy Center for Training (Tallahassee, FL)

Political Asylum/Immigration Representation Project (Boston, MA)

Ponce Law Firm, P.C. (Austin, TX)

Portland Central America Solidarity Committee (Portland, OR)

Priority Africa Network (Oakland, CA)

Progressive Democrats of Santa Monica Mountains (West Hills, CA)

Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada (Reno, NV)

Public Justice Center (Baltimore, MD)

Racial Justice Action Center/Families for Dignity and Freedom (Atlanta, GA)

Racing Horse Productions (Somerville, MA)

RAICES (San Antonio, TX)

Red de Mujeres Mexicanas en el Exterior (Indiana, PA)

Reformed Church of Highland Park, NJ (Highland Park, NJ)

Restoration Project at Casa Mariposa (Tucson, AZ)

Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network (Westminster, CO)

Rockland Immigration Coalition (New City, NY)

Rotary Club of Plano, Latin America (Plano, TX)

Rural Organizing Project (Scappoose, OR)

Safe Streets/Strong Communities (New Orleans, LA)

Salvadoran American National Network (SANN) (New York, NY)

San Antonio Immigrant Youth Movement (San Antonio, TX)

San Diego Day Laborers and Household Workers Association (Vista, CA)

San Mateo Peach Action (San Mateo, CA)

School of the Americas Watch, Los Angeles (San Gabriel, CA)

School of the Americas Watch, East Bay (Oakland, CA)

School Sisters of Notre Dame of Douglas, AZ (Douglas, AZ)

Scott D. Pollock & Associates, P.C. (Chicago, IL)

Sin Fronteras (Langley Park, MD)

Sisters of Mercy South Central Community (Belmont, NC)

Sisters of Mercy West Midwest Community (Omaha, NE)

Social Justice Guild of the First Existentialist Congregation of ATL (Atlanta, GA)

Somerville/Medford United for Justice and Peace (Somerville, MA)

Southern Poverty Law Center (Montgomery, AL)

Southerners on New Ground (Atlanta, GA)

St Louis Inter-Faith Committee on Latin America (St Louis, MO)

St Mathews Church (St Louis, MO)

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church (Chicago, IL)

St. Ann Catholic Church (St. Louis, MO)

St. Stephen and the Incarnation Episcopal Church (Washington, DC)

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church (Newport, OR)

Stepping Up for Racial Justice (Baltimore, MD)

Stone Soup Cooperative (Chicago, IL)

Stop The Checkpoints (*Port Angeles, WA*)

Student Immigrant Movement (Boston, MA)

Student Labor Action Project at UCF (Orlando, FL)

Students Informing Now (Santa Cruz, CA)

SW IA Latino Resource Center (Red Oak, IA)

Tacoma Catholic Worker (Tacoma, WA)

Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition (Nashville, TN)

Texans United for Families (Austin, TX)

Texas Jail Project (Austin, TX)

Texas Moms United to End the War on Drugs (San Antonio, TX)

The Austin Center for Peace and Justice (Austin, TX)

The Bronx Defenders (Bronx, NY)

The Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project (Florence, AZ)

The Georgia Undocumented Youth Alliance (Atlanta, GA)

The Restoration Project- Phoenix (Phoenix, AZ)

The Trauma Healing Project (Eugene, OR)

The Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights at the University of Chicago (Chicago, IL)

Tompkins County Immigrant Rights Coalition (Ithaca, NY)

Tucson Solidarity Organizing Network (Tucson, AZ)

U.C. Davis Immigration Law Clinic (Davis, CA)

UbuntU Immigration Project Countryside UU (Palatine, IL)

UnidosNow (Sarasota, Fl)

United Church of Peace (Little Rock, AR)

United Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (Chicago, IL)

Veterans For Peace Chapter 111 (Bellingham, WA)

Virginia Coalition of Latino Organizations – VACOLAO (Falls Church, VA)

Voces de la Frontera (Milwaukee, WI)

Voice of the Ex-offender (VOTE) (New Orleans, LA)

Waco DREAM Act Alliance (Waco, TX)

WarriorWorks (Austin, TX)

Washington Defender Association's Immigration Project (Seattle, WA)

Washington New Sanctuary Movement (Seattle, WA)

WeCount! (Homestead, FL)

William Davis Realty (*Carrollton*, *TX*)

Wind of the Spirit, Immigrant Resource Center (Morristown, NJ)

Women for Genuine Security (Oakland, CA)

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (Tucson, AZ)

Working Narratives (Whitesburg, KY)

Yakima Valley Citizens for Progress (Toppenish, WA)

Youth and Young Adult Network of the National Farm Worker Ministry (Orlando, FL)

North Bay Organizing Project (Graton, CA)

## **International Organizations**

CIMADE (Paris, France)

International Tribunal of Conscience (Pueblos en Movimiento) (Santa Maria, CA and Mexico) LIGHT HOUSE (Bogra, Bangladesh)

Migrante Sectoral Party List (Manila, Philippines)

People's Protection Force, Freedom in Education and OM, The Mind and Will of the 99% (Kingston, Ontario)

Youth Approach for Development & Cooperation (YADC) (Dhaka, Bangladesh)

cc: The Honorable Janet Napolitano, Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security The Honorable John Morton, Director, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement