

**Interview with an anonymous Cameroonian detainee on hunger strike at Pine Prairie ICE Processing Center, Pine Prairie, Louisiana**

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Interview by: Ryan Fatica, Perilous Chronicle

**Cameroonian Hunger Striker:** Yeah, I'm calling from Pine Prairie, Louisiana Detention facility. I want to let you know that for the past seven days we are on hunger strike, all the Black Africans are on hunger strike. And since we've been confined into, we're being confined into an isolated environment [in a segregation unit]. After we left our dorm three days [ago] when we declared the hunger, strike the officials of Pine Prairie...let us know we cannot continue staying in our dorms because they need to monitor us... They need to confine us so that they will be keeping us on monitor. Then since Monday we've been taken forcefully to confined environment. ...We have no access to TV, no access to yard, no access to medical treatment. We have not received any medical treatment.

As of now, we have been...No one has eaten yet. Unfortunately today, [this] evening, one of us had a, had an attack. We don't know presently his, I don't know his health condition. He was, he fell, and he was looking like very stiff, why we call the authorities to come and take him for a medical care. Up to now...I have not heard about him from now because of my different or far different site, in which we in the field. We are comprised of two persons and a toilet. Whereby the toilet is attached with potable drinking water. And we have access to bathe only when we request it. We've been denied. Only one time, daily, for the two days we have been here.

**Ryan Fatica:** You have access to what only when you request it?

**Cameroonian Hunger Striker:** Yeah, we have water, access to bathe only when we request once a day because we have no shower in our confined environment. They need to take us out for shower in another place where showers have been operating.

**Ryan Fatica:** You started your hunger strike again on the 21st, is that correct? Last Friday?

**Cameroonian Hunger Striker:** Yes on the 21st, the August 21st that was last Friday.

**Ryan Fatica:** And what are you demanding? Why are you hunger striking?

**Cameroonian Hunger Striker:** What we are demanding is...Before, on the...10th of this August, we officially declared the hunger strike whereby we asked the authorities that we needed to talk with ICE. For the reason that for the past one year, the least of us has at least 10 to 19 months in this facility. For the past one year that we have the here, we have never seen our deportation officers or neither seen any supervisor of such come in knowing us personally, for our issues, for parole issues. So there came a time when we sat and we decided that we needed to talk with our deportation officers. And we wrote letters to the administration to the ICE. And they told us that there is no way we could meet them

because they are too busy. We said elsewhere, the deportation officer didn't meet, meet the asylum seekers.

Because we are asylum seekers. We are not prisoners. So how come about? And now we have been sending parole documents. From last, from January to now, everything we heard of is we are flight risk. We are denied. We don't know what we committed as a crime in the USA, or, and we are, we are at arriving aliens. So this puts us in March. The first hunger strike went on that was in March. We went on hunger strike from March, when some people resisted for ten days. From the 10th of March to the 10th of March, why some people did not resist within that meeting at one of ICE officials came...he was a supervisor.... And we plead our problems to him. And he let us know if we have family members here as well...are citizens as well. We are arriving aliens then we have the right for parole.

And that he was new in Louisiana, in the [inaudible] ICE office, he was new and he doesn't know why things are not being done here the way things were being done where he was. And he was surprised that there would be when we showed him documents of our family members, citizens, ready to receive us. He said, then why? Why have them? Nobody would listen on any way. Let him, let us give him time for him to check on what has been happening. Since then, nothing has changed. Nothing change. Only. We felt just an impact of three, two Cameroonians who finally got...they left here by parole. And up to then we have more than 50. We have more than 50 Africans here, which has never been paroled. So when we left that March, after the hunger strike, we thought things wouldn't be the same. Nothing has changed practically.

Within the month of August 10th, we asked again...before August 10th, we applied within the facility that we needed to talk with the ICE officials, because we still needed them to explain certain things to us. Why else would people have been paroled with this same document in which you have family members have been seen? And yet it's a difficult thing. When we started the hunger strike by [August 10], they call, they brought one official year call one official. He came and said he was a supervisor. He was named [inaudible]. Something of that sort. That he was a supervisor. And he said, we gave him all the details about why are we not paroled? Parole monitored? Bond paroled? So he said he would take all our grievances to the head office because he cannot make a decision and he'll be coming in three days time to give us a response. So within the three days time, they asked us to go and resume, resume our hunger strike. Let's resume [our strike] while wait for the results. Not everybody agreed to that. Some people that was on medication, they decided to go back on their daily activities. Why some people were still left in their dorm without eating and without taking any such activities within the facility. Then he came by that day, the man came that was a Thursday. He brought me of, that was a promise or five this letter that you ought to come that last Tuesday, the...

**Prison phone system:** "you have one minute remaining for this call."

**Cameroonian Hunger Striker:** Tuesday the 14th. The man never came and only came on Thursday. Last Thursday, when he came last Thursday, the first thing he told us was parole was being instructed to be given to pregnant women and not to adults. And to children. And we let him know that neither we are women here in this facility, nor that we are children, but we're being given parole forms ask for parole. So what is...can he confirm what he's telling us? In any form of documentation? Because we have those

documents with all that we are eligible for parole. Parole is not only for pregnant women. That is what he told us. And that before the 7th of March, they have been preparing slides to take people back to....

**Prison phone system:** "You have exceeded the allowable time for this call. Goodbye."

**Recorder:** "This call is now being recorded."

**Cameroonian Hunger Striker:** Okay. So as I was explaining. So when the officer came that day after giving us about five days waiting. After keeping us about the one week waiting after the last meeting we got with him. He asked us, he told us that the first thing you led us to know that parole was being given to pregnant women and kids and children. And we told him in this camp, wherever we are in this camp, we have never seen any immigrant women in this camp, not to top off a child...not in this camp. And when we came here by November, most of us were given documents to parole documents to sign and that we can start applying for our parole. And if today you have the audacity to tell us that parole is being given to women and pregnant women, which we know that is not the case, because we have family members that have fled the country because of the...because of the genocide and the war in Cameroon, because I'm a Cameroonian by nationality.

We heard, most of them, that they were being given parole in other detention [facilities]. In other in other regions, other detention [facilities], other States, wherever they are. These things are just different here in Pine Prairie [inaudible] because even in our detention...some detention [centers] in Louisiana, we have heard from people...that's had parole. So he told us, maybe they're not doing things right. And we said, well, if you are the people doing things on the right way, we can understand. And the reasons in which we are here, may be for a purpose. And the purpose they keep us here may be only in preparing to send us back home.

So when all that transpired within that meeting, before we went...before we went on the 10 days, the hunger strike would be declared on the 10th. We were being assaulted within this facility because three...When we went for chow and we denied to eat and on our way out from chow, from [the cafeteria] we were asked to be conveyed to an isolated area, which has been named *pozo*<sup>1</sup>. This is where most of the detainees that commit crimes in this facility detainees that fight. Or...of recent they have been using it for keeping COVID-19 patients or people that they bring up from the facility keeping them to monitor. So they decided to push us in. And then we decided to say we are peacefully protesting, and we are not destroying any of these things, and...they don't have any reason to take us there. We...three people have been wounded. While they were trying to resist to enter the *pozo* and we've been pointed with guns...and tear gas and all the...officers and some [inaudible]. We had to make some calls and they decided that we should go in our dorms. After having passed about two hours [since] the confrontation with them. Because we told them that we are not going and we sat down and we put our hands up and we said, "You will only take us by force, but we are not using force on them. It was the troops using force on that particular day.

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<sup>1</sup> "El Pozo" is a term for the segregation unit of a detention facility or prison. It derives from the Spanish word "pozo" which means "hole" or "pit."

So when he came, when the ICE officer finally came we talked with him and we explained most of those things, and he promised us to come and resolve...when he only come with that result of pregnant women. And...when we decided on the treat, the first to go on the same hunger strike because the result the official gave us didn't work. The [officials told us that] if we will not be eating we'll be locked up. And on Monday, the 23rd we are all being taken to *pozo* and before we are being taken to *pozo* they brought a lot of men armed men here, which we could not even identify the officer as well. We don't know them they were dressed as if they're going to battle. But fortunately, when they arrive, all of us are peaceful as we are. We have prepared already to leave to the *pozo* without any violence because whatever our brother...went through...on the 10th, it teaches us a lot of lessons to know that if we continue to be, if we continued to resist, they may have a reason maybe to wound us to shoot us or to do anything they want to do. But we choose that path of not being violent and then walk out and pack our things in our cells and move to *pozo*. And the told us we went to *pozo*, because we want to put on you watch, supervision. But unfortunately up to then no one has been taking..[inaudible] each week. Temperature is read on daily temperature or BP as well. And we have most of the people asthmatic...people have problem, as people with [inaudible], we are even, we are even patients eligible for parole or maybe closer to COVID-19.

On that same day when we arrived to *pozo* we were forced to enter a section that was where people were being quarantined for COVID-19. And these people who have quarantined have not finished because they needed to put, push us in. They forced us in forcefully and they told us we would only get in forcefully if we don't walk. Most of us resisted and told them, "By the way, our life is in your hands for pushing us where people are just coming out without finishing their quarantine."

And they let us know these people have about two or three days or four days more. One of them told us they have about three days more. By the way, they were never quarantined for the reason that they have COVID-19. And we let them know that yes, we know that quarantine is an issue to really determine within the 14 days. Not the least after 13 days you can still test positive. Now these people are still on their 10 to 11 days. So given the fact that their quarantine is not finished, that environment is not safe for us to be there. But since you choose to use force on us, we'll go there, but giving our life in your hands. And in the....[inaudible] facilities as well. So we finally go in. Up to [now] no medical attention, no one is eating yet. No one people that are [inaudible], maybe some are taking some are not taking because we have some people who have blood pressure [problems]. That is what we are doing at this particular moment.

**Ryan Fatica:** How long will your hunger strike last? How long will you be on hunger strike?

**Cameroonian Hunger Striker:** We cannot determine how long we will be. We can only determine how long we'll be [striking] according to if our problems are being answered. I can't talk for others, but I will talk for myself. I will [stop striking] if our problems are answered in the right way.