

Testimony of Iván García
Detainee at Winn Correctional Center
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My name is Iván García. On Friday, we were protesting because we wanted them to give us a response to what was going to happen with our cases. We were peacefully protesting, we were asking for an ICE representative to come and give us an answer. Prison security started to arrive, and they started to threaten us, that they were going to shoot pepper spray. And so we told them that there are people who are sick here. Me, in my particular case, I have asthma. In fact, my voice is a little hoarse because the gas affected me. I showed them, it was recorded on camera, I showed them the device for my asthma. Many people here told them that they're diabetic and were pleading for them to not fire the gas. The guards ran out and fired pepper spray, they released pepper spray through the vents, and they closed the door. We were nearly suffocating inside, there was no way to breathe. We were nearly at the point of passing out, we begged them to open the door, that we were going to suffocate. When they saw that people were down on the ground, that I was on the floor at the side of the door, begging them to open it; they took me and another compañero out and brought us to a gym and held us, sitting there until four in the morning. But they didn't give us medical attention, they didn't do anything. They just sat us down there to wait.

They were threatening everyone, this is still going on. They humiliate us, they kick our beds, all this has been agony. In my case, I've been detained in this prison for one year and three months, but I've been in this country for eight years. I was kidnapped and brought to Mexico. I came back with my partner and introduced them to my partner, and they said yes, that I lived here, but I don't have the right to stay in the country. I have nothing. They told me that I have to stay here, stay here, stay here, they don't tell me anything. It's been a year and three months. They found me worthy of parole but they don't care about that. Here, in this unit, we know at least fourteen or fifteen Cubans who are waiting on their asylum cases, but for everyone else, their asylum cases were denied. They mistreat us, they humiliate us, they don't tell us anything.

They tell us that we have to wait. That they don't know if our country, which is Cuba, is going to accept us because of the pandemic. So we have to remain prisoners. They're violating all the rules, all the laws of this country. We came to this country seeking freedom, we came here because it's a country with human rights. Supposedly a country where we can be free, where we can provide a future for our children. The last thing we've found here is freedom. Since we've arrived it's been imprisonment, mistreatment, and we're denouncing that. We're not looking for trouble. They're recording me and I don't care, that they're recording and supervising this call. But a lot of news doesn't get out about this center, because when we report it, they cut the recordings and threaten to put us in the hole if we keep reporting what's going on. All these things are happening in this prison.

The only thing we begging for is that, please, make a decision regarding us. We haven't committed crimes, we're not criminals. Here in this prison I've seen another thing I want to tell you about - the prisoners, the criminal prisoners, who have thirty or forty year sentences walk

around freely in this prison. They cook the food and walk around like nothing. And us, they have locked up. They humiliate us. They make us line up like the worst criminals in this country, and we haven't committed a crime. Our only crime was to come looking for freedom in this country, which is the one thing we don't have.

In this unit, everyone was participating, protesting that please, let us out, that they tell an official from ICE, that they come see us face to face. It's been months since we've seen someone from ICE here. It's been months since we've gotten an answer about anything. That's what we're asking for. We made a sheet saying "Freedom", that they please release us. And then they showed up and threatened us. Me

and another compañero kneeled in front of the captain and told her that if you're going to shoot gas, I'm asthmatic; I showed her my device for asthma. I have my medicine. If you fire gas, there are people who are sick here, with hypertension, diabetes. And they didn't understand. They sent a group of security that looked like they were looking for the worst criminals in this country, as if we were the worst criminals. They had weapons with rubber bullets, pepper spray, threatening us. In another unit they hit a compañero in the face, another they knocked out of his wheelchair with the pepper spray, and they didn't care. The only thing they cared about was taking care of the prison. They don't care about anyone's life here.

No, they didn't negotiate about anything. When they arrived, they were threatening us. They didn't negotiate at any moment. They came in ugly and said if we kept protesting they were going to fire pepper spray. And we were shouting, "fire it, fire it, we're not doing anything wrong, we're just asking for someone to come, to show their face." And they fired pepper spray and closed the windows so that we practically couldn't breathe.

Firstly, we clarified to the prison guards that our problem isn't with you. Our problem is with ICE. ICE is who has us detained here. We don't want you to attack us and we don't want to attack you, we're not here for that. We understand that you are guards at this prison and your job is to watch over us and protect the prison. But we want ICE to come. Our problem isn't with you. And they said ICE isn't going to come. ICE will come tomorrow. And we kept demanding. And so they said that if we didn't calm down, if we didn't stop shouting, they were going to fire pepper spray. And they fired pepper spray and they did it to all of us.

I want to add that later, the other day, ICE came and they also threatened us. They threatened to fire gas, the ICE supervisor said this. The supervisor here also threatened us, he said supposedly I just have to take care of you in the prison. And those that came were threatening us that if we didn't control ourselves, they were going to fire gas, too.

I don't care about what might happen to me, let it happen. They can do their worst to me in this prison. If they kill me in the hole, I'll leave satisfied. But I'm going to denounce the crimes and abuses that are happening to us, not just to me, but to all the people here. Here we don't have social distancing or anything. The guards come in without masks and they don't know if they're infected or not. There are many cases of coronavirus here inside and they don't say anything. They're hiding everything. There are infected people here and they're not saying anything. This is

all just a business. They're making money off of us. The warden of the prison came in front of us and said, "I'm getting two million dollars a month," laughing in our faces.

If someone is sick here, to get out they have to submit a request to the medic. There have been people with fevers and aches and they haven't been moved. It takes three or four days to get moved. There haven't been any deaths, because we're strong. The common prisoners come into the unit and cook the food and we just ask they have pity. We're just people who came to work and to be free in this country. We don't want anything else.