

November 9, 2017

The Honorable Elaine C. Duke
Acting Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Acting Secretary Duke,

We respectfully write to you to express our deep concern about multiple reports of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) targeting over 100 Cambodians and 100 Vietnamese across the country for detention and possible deportation¹. Reports of these detentions indicate that a significant number of detained individuals belong to our communities in California. The raids are a source of worry and stress for many families in and around our communities.

In recent months, constituents have contacted our offices to express terror and trauma that they are experiencing from escalated deportation tactics of this Administration. Most, if not all, of those detained were lawful permanent residents who came to the United States as refugees following the end of the Vietnam War and the Khmer Rouge genocide. Many were born in refugee camps and have never set foot in the countries that ICE would remove them to.

Upon arrival into the U.S., many were resettled into struggling neighborhoods. Still coping with significant trauma from the war, these refugees made mistakes as teenagers and young adults and were funneled into the criminal justice system. All of them served their time, and the majority transformed their lives to become productive community members, business owners, and loving parents supporting their U.S citizen families. They have checked in dutifully with ICE, some for decades, only now to be suddenly arrested and detained.

We are concerned that the recent actions by ICE are a part of U.S. pressure tactics around revising the current MOU that allows for the repatriation of these individuals in Cambodia. Similarly, we are very concerned by reports of the detention of pre-1995 arrivals from Vietnam, since the United States has had a repatriation agreement in place with the U.S since 2008 that protects these individuals.

It is troubling to see one of the biggest roundups of Southeast Asian refugees in recent memory happening during the first year of this Administration. Our constituents and families across the country should not be used as political pawns while the U.S. works out diplomatic disputes. We urge the Department of Homeland Security to release these people immediately and provide an explanation for any changes in procedure leading to the recent detentions of Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees by ICE. Additionally, we urge ICE to share information on the exact number of people detained throughout the country, and encourage transparency with families and organizations supporting those who are impacted.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

¹ <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-cambodian-deportees-20171103-story.html>

Sincerely,

Members of Congress