

Behind Guatemalan youth's death in ICE detention camp

written by Scott Scheffer
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Bartolomé Hernández with photo of his son Carlos, who died in ICE custody in May 2019.

New information has come forward about the May 20 death of a child-16-year-old Carlos Gregorio Hernández Vásquez-while illegally held in an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) concentration camp near McAllen, Texas.

Video footage of Carlos' last hours in the tiny concrete cell, which has gone viral, spotlights the torture and murder-by-medical-neglect of migrants, which is now standard practice, in spite of stated U.S. policy.

Obtained under the Freedom of Information Act [by ProPublica](#), the grainy footage begins about 4 hours after Carlos finally received the correct treatment-too late-and shows him suffering, writhing in pain, vomiting and finally unable to stand and vomiting blood on the floor shortly before his passing became apparent.

Though Carlos had been diagnosed with the flu and had a fever of 103 degrees, he wasn't given Tamiflu, the drug normally used against the infection, for 19 hours. The video has a 4-hour unexplained gap during which ICE claims it made its mandatory welfare checks.

The news of how Carlos' death occurred roughly coincides with the one-year anniversary of the death of 7-year-old Jakelín Caal Maquín, who died of a bacterial infection. At least seven children are known to have died while in the custody of ICE since last year.

According to an [analysis by NBC News](#), as of June, some 24 migrants had died in ICE custody during the Trump administration. But this tally doesn't include five children and 19 adults who died in the custody of other federal agencies.

It should be pointed out that an even higher number of deaths while in ICE custody-32-occurred in 2004 under the administration of George W. Bush. But the number of migrants dying in the desert while crossing, dying while in custody, or already ill and dying shortly after being released, has spiked.

War on Indigenous Guatemalans

Carlos was an Indigenous Mayan from Guatemala. His family's native language was Achi — one of many languages among Mayan peoples. The region where he lived suffers deep poverty and was targeted by brutal state repression beginning in the early 1980s.

The [Women's Media Center](#) reports that 28 massacres took the lives of more than 20 percent of the Achi-speaking population. The center's 2010 survey uncovered widespread sexualized violence as part of the U.S.-backed regime's efforts to stamp out the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias, an alliance of armed groups fighting for social justice.

A statement by the [International Mayan League](#) spoke of the immense difficulties: "The lack of opportunities and interest in the advancement of Indigenous peoples by the government has led to a mass exodus of people, mostly Indigenous, seeking better living conditions. ... In addition to this, the detention by the Border Patrol, the human rights violations suffered in detention and the most inhumane laws and policies which currently prevail under the Trump administration are all an attack to our people rightfully seeking asylum."

Carlos left his home in Guatemala hoping to find work in the U.S. He was one of nine children and, like many, spent hours as a child playing made-up games that revolved around crossing the border. His family called him Gollito. He comes from a musical family and loved playing the piano, bass and other instruments. He was captain of his school's soccer team. Among his siblings, his brother Edgar had special needs, and he dreamt of being able to help support Edgar. He was 16 in May when taken into custody and separated from his older sister by ICE.

Like thousands of other minors, Carlos was illegally held in a horrid ICE detention camp well past the 72-hour legal limit. Not that any part of the treatment of

migrants in the US is legal, safe, adequate or humane, but minors are supposed to be transferred to facilities run by the Department of Health and Human Services, where allegedly they receive better health care. This law is now ignored, and thousands of refugees and asylum seekers are imperiled by the dangerous conditions that result.



Doctors for Camp Closure protest at Chula Vista Border Patrol Station, Dec. 9.

Trump regime refuses flu vaccines

After Carlos was diagnosed as having the flu on May 19, he was given only Tylenol and locked in a concrete cell along with another detainee who was ill. As is typical, the lights in the cell were never turned off, preventing sound sleep, the two beds were concrete slabs and the detainees—including children—were given only a Mylar blanket.

Flu and other infectious diseases are spreading rapidly among the thousands of migrants in ICE custody. The Center for Disease Control issued a dire warning and condemnation over the reckless and inhumane treatment of migrants in the camps when a dangerous outbreak of mumps occurred in August.

Not long after that, the Trump administration announced that it would not allow the administration of influenza vaccines to detainees ahead of flu season.

Doctors for Camp Closure, a group of doctors and other medical workers formed in response to the outbreak of flu among refugees and asylum seekers, has been campaigning to force the Trump administration to allow flu vaccines. After numerous requests for meetings with immigration officials, they began traveling from across the U.S. to demonstrate at the San Diego Border Patrol Headquarters. On Dec. 17, police in the near-border city of Chula Vista, Calif., [arrested six doctors](#) for their efforts.

Their determined campaign mirrors the successful campaign by activists who fought against the Pennsylvania prison system's policy of denying medication for hepatitis C to prisoners, a campaign which saved the life of famed political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal and allowed the distribution of the medication to 7,000 other prisoners.

Close the concentration camps! No borders in the workers' struggle!

