



MEDIA ADVISORY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Experts Available to Discuss Conditions at Detention Center Holding Central American Children, Mothers
"Conditions are abhorrent and shocking," says attorney Kim Hunter who was at the detention center in Artesia, New Mexico last week. "The on-the-ground reality is as though the worst of all of the border legislation that was proposed and failed did, in fact, pass."

What: Kim Hunter, immigration attorney and long-time volunteer with The Advocates for Human Rights, and Deepinder Mayell, director of The Advocates' Refugee & Immigrant Program, are available for interviews on the deplorable conditions in the Artesia family detention center in New Mexico and how mothers and their children are being railroaded, and many have already been deported as a result of the U.S government's top-down approach of "Discourage. Deny. Deport."

When: Interviews can be scheduled at any time

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Fed up and frustrated with what is happening to Central American children and families, attorney Kim Hunter traveled to New Mexico last week to work as a volunteer at the government's Artesia family detention center, a facility that holds 600 people, including children. What she saw there sickened her. "Conditions are abhorrent and shocking," she said. "All of the mothers and children are cold, and wrap towels around their shoulders to bring some measure of comfort. Mothers 'swaddle' their infants with washcloths to try to keep them warm."

Hunter discovered that about 80 percent of the children and families in the center have valid claims for asylum, with the majority of claims based on domestic violence or gang issues. Nonetheless, the percentage of people making it through the initial step of the asylum process in the detention center is a dismal 37 percent. Nationwide, 70 percent of people seeking asylum make it through the initial step of the asylum process.

Mothers and children in Artesia are being railroaded, according to Hunter. The process has been set up, from the top down, with the mantra, "Discourage. Deny. Deport." — even to the point of an asylum officer and an immigration judge ruling against a mother who had been beaten so severely by her partner that she miscarried, sending her back to her home country and to heightened danger. The government is actively ignoring domestic violence claims.

"ICE is filing a boilerplate 131-page exhibit that is part of every bond hearing, claiming that all of these families are a security risk and thus should remain in custody," said Hunter. "Even people who have relatives and loved ones in the U.S. who are willing to house and provide for them remain jailed. And of course, ICE's policy memos on placing people on parole after they have positive credible fear interviews are being completely disregarded."

People are being herded through the system en masse, with absolutely no genuine regard to due process. "In sum, the on-the-ground reality feels as though the worst of all of the border legislation that was proposed and failed did, in fact, pass," Hunter said.

About Kim Hunter

Kim Hunter is with Kim Hunter & Associates, P.L.L.C. in St. Paul, and is a long-time volunteer with The Advocates

for Human Rights. She is a member of the American Immigration Lawyers Association and the National Immigration Project, and is a frequent presenter on immigration panels at continuing legal education seminars.

About Deepinder Mayell

Deepinder Mayell is an attorney and director of the The Advocates for Human Rights' Refugee & Immigrant Program, which provides free representation to low-income asylum seekers and refugees in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota. Prior to joining The Advocates, Mayell was a staff attorney with Merrimack Valley Legal Services in Massachusetts where he represented poor victims of domestic violence in family, immigration, and housing proceedings. As a research assistant, he examined the constitutionality of laws utilized to imprison individuals in Guantanamo Bay. He was also a member of a research team that investigated and documented labor conditions in apparel factories in Jakarta, Indonesia.

About The Advocates for Human Rights

The largest provider in the Upper Midwest of free legal services to low income people seeking asylum, The Advocates for Human Rights implements international human rights standards to promote civil society and to reinforce the rule of law. An independent, non-partisan non-profit organization, The Advocates exposes human rights violations; represents immigrants and refugees seeking asylum; trains and assists groups that protect human rights; and uses research, education, and advocacy to engage the public, policy-makers, and children to advance human rights.