



Inter-Agency Working Group on
Reproductive Health in Crises

IAWG EXPRESSES GRAVE CONCERN OVER ALLEGED
FORCED STERILIZATION AND OTHER VIOLATIONS BY THE
UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT OF THE FUNDAMENTAL
HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN ITS CUSTODY, AND
URGES PROMPT AND THOROUGH INVESTIGATION INTO
PRACTICES AT THE IRWIN COUNTY DETENTION CENTER

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Since 1995, IAWG - whose members include a diverse group of humanitarian organizations, sexual and reproductive health (SRH) service providers, advocates, and UN agencies - has worked to ensure that essential, life-saving and rights fulfilling SRH services are a core element of the healthcare services provided in crisis-affected settings which include facilities for refugees and internally displaced persons. As a global coalition of providers of and advocates for upholding sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in humanitarian settings, IAWG is deeply concerned for the health, well-being and rights of women currently detained in the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) run Irwin County Detention Center (ICDC) in Ocilla, located in the state of Georgia in the United States.

On Monday, September 14th 2020, four advocacy organizations - Project South, Georgia Detention Watch, Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights, South Georgia Immigrant Support Network - filed a complaint with the United States Federal Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General outlining concerns from a client, as well as Dawn Wooten, a licensed nurse practitioner, against the ICDC for performing non-consensual hysterectomies on immigrant women, failing to follow COVID-19 safety procedures, as well as other examples of medical neglect.ⁱ

The allegations of medical neglect and forced hysterectomies at the ICDC are deeply disturbing. Evidence is emerging that these violations are indicative of a pattern of human rights violations across the processes and facilities of ICE that are disproportionately impacting Black and brown women, children and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in custody.ⁱⁱ Forced sterilization constitutes a grave violation of international human rights law, including the right to be free from torture and inhumane treatment as well as the rights to privacy, health and non-discrimination. In cases where it is proven to be widespread and systematic, forced sterilization also rises to threshold of a crime against humanity under international criminal law.

As part of the global SRHR and humanitarian community, IAWG calls for:

- Immediate access to quality, available and informed non-discriminatory and comprehensive health services, including sexual and reproductive health, psychosocial, legal, and livelihood support and other multi-sectoral services for all detainees in ICE facilities in the United States including any survivorsⁱⁱⁱ of forced sterilization and other obstetric, reproductive and sexual violence in ICE facilities, in addition to access to justice, redress and health remedies that are adequate, effective, promptly attributed, holistic and proportional to the gravity of the harm suffered.^{iv}
- A full investigation and immediate accountability for everyone involved including full protection from reprisal or retaliation for those involved in surfacing these allegations.
- The processing of asylum claims in ICE detention centers in compliance with the legal obligations outlined in the International 1951 Refugee Convention, the International Convention Against Torture and United States Refugee Act, 1980.

ⁱ Project South, Georgia Detention Watch, Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights, South Georgia Immigrant Support Network, Re: Lack of Medical Care, Unsafe Work Practices, and Absence of Adequate Protection Against COVID-19 for Detained Immigrants and Employees Alike at the Irwin County Detention Center, September 14th 2020. Accessed: <https://projectsouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/OIG-ICDC-Complaint-1.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Women’s Refugee Commission, Center for Reproductive Rights, American Friends Service Committee & Human Rights First, *Pregnant Immigrants and Asylum Seekers During COVID-19* September 14, 2020. Accessed: <https://projectsouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/OIG-ICDC-Complaint-1.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ S/RES/2106 (2013)

^{iv} S/RES/2467 (2019)