

Exhibit 1

**NOTICE AND WARRANT OF APPREHENSION AND REMOVAL
UNDER THE ALIEN ENEMIES ACT**

A-File No: _____ Date: _____

In the Matter of: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Sex: Male Female

Warrant of Apprehension and Removal

To any authorized law enforcement officer:

The President has found that Tren de Aragua is perpetrating, attempting, or threatening an invasion or predatory incursion against the territory of the United States, and that Tren de Aragua members are thus Alien Enemies removable under Title 50, United States Code, Section 21.

_____ has been determined to be: (1) at least fourteen years of
(Full Name of Alien Enemy)
age; (2) not a citizen or lawful permanent resident of the United States; (3) a citizen of Venezuela; and (4) a member of Tren de Aragua. Accordingly, he or she has been determined to be an Alien Enemy and, under Title 50, United States Code, Section 21, he or she shall be apprehended, restrained, and removed from the United States pursuant to this Warrant of Apprehension and Removal.

Signature of Supervisory Officer: _____

Title of Officer: _____ **Date:** _____

Notice to Alien Enemy

I am a law enforcement officer authorized to apprehend, restrain, and remove Alien Enemies. You have been determined to be at least fourteen years of age; not a citizen or lawful permanent resident of the United States; a citizen of Venezuela; and a member of Tren de Aragua. Accordingly, under the Alien Enemies Act, you have been determined to be an Alien Enemy subject to apprehension, restraint, and removal from the United States. Until you are removed from the United States, you will be detained under Title 50, United States Code, Section 21. Any statement you make now or while you are in custody may be used against you in any administrative or criminal proceeding. This is not a removal under the Immigration and Nationality Act. If you desire to make a phone call, you will be permitted to do so.

After being removed from the United States, you must request and obtain permission from the Secretary of Homeland Security to enter or attempt to enter the United States at any time. Should you enter or attempt to enter the United States without receiving such permission, you will be subject to immediate removal and may be subject to criminal prosecution and imprisonment.

Signature of alien: _____ Date: _____

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I personally served a copy of this Notice and Warrant upon the above-named person on _____
and ensured it was read to this person in a language he or she understands. (Date)

Name of officer/agent

Signature of officer/agent

Exhibit 2

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
BROWNSVILLE DIVISION**

J.A.V., et al.,

Petitioner.

v.

DONALD J. TRUMP, et al.,

Respondents.

Civil Action No. 1:25-cv-072

DECLARATION OF ASSISTANT FIELD OFFICE DIRECTOR

Pursuant to the authority of 28 U.S.C. § 1746, I, Carlos D. Cisneros, an Assistant Field Office Director for U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO), Harlingen, Texas (TX) declare as follows:

1. I am an Assistant Field Office Director (“AFOD”) for U.S. Department of Homeland Security, United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Enforcement and Removal Operations (“ICE ERO Harlingen”). I began my employment with ICE (Legacy Immigration and Naturalization Service) on January 18, 2000, and I have been serving as the AFOD for ICE ERO Harlingen since August 28, 2022.

2. In my role as AFOD, I oversee ERO enforcement operations for the Harlingen Office. As an AFOD, I am responsible for the supervision of deportation officers managing detained cases in Harlingen, Texas. I am also responsible for overseeing the safety, security and care of individuals in my custody.

3. While preparing this declaration, I have examined the official records available to me regarding the Alien Enemies Act (AEA) notice procedure. I submit this declaration to outline

the notice procedure and to inform the court about why a description of the procedure should be kept under seal.

A. The Notice

4. Attached as an exhibit to this declaration is a copy of Form AEA-21B, which ICE officers serve on aliens whom the Agency intends to detain or remove pursuant to the AEA. Each alien is served individually, and the Form AEA-21B is read and explained to each alien in a language that alien understands.

5. Consistent with a Notice to Appear in Title 8 proceedings, the Form AEA-21B is written in the English language. However, it is read and explained to each alien in a language that alien understands. ICE officers are accustomed to working with aliens who do not understand English.

6. Through an ICE-wide contract with a language assistance vendor (i.e. language lines), ICE uses professional oral interpretation and translation services that cover more than 200 languages, including rare and Indigenous languages. Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) serves as the Contracting Officer Representative for this ICE-wide language services contract. Centralizing oversight over the contract allows better coordination with the vendor and the establishment of processes for obtaining regular reports. Additionally, many ERO staff have sufficient proficiency in one or more languages other than English and communicate with limited English proficiency (LEP) persons in their primary language when appropriate.

7. Pursuant to ICE detention standards, oral interpretation or assistance is provided to any detained alien who is illiterate or who speaks another language in which written material has not been translated.

8. The various ICE Detention Standards under which detention facilities operate require that information be provided to LEP persons in a language or manner they can understand throughout the detention process to provide them with meaningful access to programs and services. This may be accomplished through use of bilingual staff or professional interpretation and translation services. Depending on the type of facility and contract specifications, the contractor may have and use their own dedicated language line.

B. Habeas Components to the Process

9. The alien is served individually with a copy of the Notice, Form AEA 21-B, the notice is read to the alien in a language that he or she understands.

10. As part of the notice procedure, the alien is informed that he or she can make a telephone call to whomever he or she desires, including legal representatives. ICE ensures that telephones are made available for the aliens and that the aliens have access to the telephone lines.

11. Although there may be fact-specific exceptional cases, in a general case, after an alien is served with Form AEA 21-B, the alien is given a reasonable amount of time, and no less than 12 hours, including the ability to make a telephone call, to indicate or express an intent to file a habeas petition. If the alien does not express any such intention, then ICE may proceed with the removal, though such removal may not actually occur for many more hours or days, giving the alien additional time to express an intent. If the alien does express an intent to file a habeas petition, the alien is given a reasonable amount of time, and no less than 24 hours, to actually file that petition. If the alien does not file such a petition within 24 hours, then ICE may proceed with the removal, though such removal may not actually occur for many more hours or days, giving the alien additional time to file the petition. Further, because aliens subject to the AEA are often detained for several days before removal, they frequently have much more time to express an intent to file a habeas petition or to actually file such a petition. Moreover, these timeframes are consistent with, if not more generous than, the timeframes used for expedited removal procedures under Title 8.

12. In nearly every case in which an alien files a habeas petition based on detention related to the AEA, the alien also seeks a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO). The TRO request is typically adjudicated quickly, sometimes within hours of being filed. Although there may be fact-specific exceptional cases, in a general case, ICE will not remove under the AEA an alien who has filed a habeas petition while that petition is pending. However, ICE may reconsider that position in cases where a TRO has been denied and the habeas proceedings have not concluded within a reasonable time.

C. Justification for Sealing the Description of the Notice Procedure

13. The internal notice procedure outlined in this declaration should be filed and remain under seal because this process is law enforcement sensitive. In this circumstance, revealing our notice procedure would disclose to the public guidelines that are integral to conducting law enforcement investigations and could risk circumvention of the law.

Signed this _____ day of April 2025.

**CARLOS D
CISNEROS JR**

Digitally signed by
CARLOS D CISNEROS
JR
Date: 2025.04.23
13:59:11 -05'00'

Carlos D. Cisneros
Assistant Field Office Director
Enforcement and Removal Operations
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

Exhibit 3

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF GEORGIA**

Y.A.P.A.,

Petitioner–Plaintiff,

v.

DONALD J. TRUMP, in his official capacity as
President of the United States, *et al.*,

Respondents–Defendants.

Case No. 4:25-cv-00144

DECLARATION OF REBECCA M. CASSLER

I, Rebecca M. Cassler, declare as follows:

1. I am over eighteen years of age and I am competent to make this declaration.
2. I am a lawyer at the American Immigration Council. I represent the Petitioner in this case.
3. Attached hereto as exhibits are true and correct copies of the following:

Exhibit Documents

1. “Alien Enemy Validation Guide,” “Verification of Removal,” and “Notice and Warrant of Apprehension and Removal Under the Alien Enemies Act” Transcription.
2. Dep’t of Homeland Sec., Homeland Sec. Investigations, Assessment Report of Analysis (HSI-CHI-24-455).
3. Dep’t of Homeland Sec., U.S. Border Patrol, Situational Awareness: TDA Gang Recognition Indicators (Oct. 2, 2023).
4. Syra Ortiz Blanes, Veronica Egui Brito & Claire Healy, *Trump Sent These Venezuelans to El Salvador Mega Prison. Their Families Deny Gang Ties*, Miami Herald (Mar. 18, 2025), available at <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/immigration/article302251339.html>.

5. Veronica Egui Brito, *Despite Refugee Status in the U.S., Young Venezuelan Was Deported to Salvadoran Prison*, Miami Herald (Mar. 21, 2025), available at <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/immigration/article302464134.html>.
6. Patrick J. McDonnell et al., *They Were Called Gang Members and Deported. Families Say Their Only Crime Was Having Tattoos*, L.A. Times (Mar. 23, 2025), available at <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2025-03-23/deportation-trump-venezuelans-el-salvador>.
7. Carla Gloria Colome & Florantonia Singer, *Arturo and Frizgeralth, Convicted for Being Venezuelans: Trump Takes Another Step in His Racist Drift*, El Pais (Mar. 24, 2025), available at <https://english.elpais.com/international/2025-03-24/arturo-and-frizgeralth-convicted-for-being-venezuelans-trump-takes-another-step-in-his-racist-drift.html>.
8. Arelis R. Hernandez & Maria Luisa Paul, *They Were Arrested During Routine ICE Check-Ins. Then They Were Disappeared*, Wash. Post (Mar. 22, 2025), available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2025/03/22/trump-venezuela-migrants-el-salvador/>.
9. Syra Ortiz Blanes & Veronica Egui Brito, *U.S. Sent Venezuelan Man with Pending Political Asylum Case to El Salvador Mega Prison*, Miami Herald (Mar. 27, 2025), available at <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/immigration/article302671624.html>.
10. Noah Lanard & Isabela Dias, *You're Here Because of Your Tattoos*, Mother Jones (Mar. 26, 2025), available at <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2025/03/trump-el-salvador-venezuela-deportation-prison-cecot-bukele/>.
11. Tom Phillips & Clavel Rangel, *Deported Because of His Tattoos: Has the US Targeted Venezuelans for Their Body Art?*, Guardian (Mar. 20, 2025), available at <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/mar/20/deported-because-of-his-tattoos-has-the-us-targeted-venezuelans-for-their-body-art>.
12. Charlie Savage & Julian E. Barnes, *Intelligence Assessment Said to Contradict Trump on Venezuelan Gang*, N.Y. Times (Mar. 22, 2025), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/20/us/politics/intelligence-trump-venezuelan-gang-alien-enemies.html>.
13. Nicole Acevedo, Deon J. Hampton & David Noriega, *Tattoos of Deported Venezuelans Don't Necessarily Signal Gang Affiliation, Experts Say*, NBC News (Mar. 21, 2025), available at <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/tattoos-deported-venezuelans-not-necessarily-gang-members-rcna197089>.

14. Julie Turjewitz, Jazmine Ulloa, Isayen Herrera, Hamed Aleaziz & Zolan Kanno-Youngs, *'Alien Enemies' or Innocent Men? Inside Trump's Rushed Effort to Deport 238 Migrants*, N.Y. Times (Apr. 15, 2025), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/15/world/americas/trump-migrants-deportations.html>.
15. Jonathan Blitzer, *The Makeup Artist Donald Trump Deported under the Alien Enemies Act*, New Yorker (Mar. 31, 2025), available at <https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-immigration/the-makeup-artist-donald-trump-deported-under-the-alien-enemies-act>.
16. *About 90% of migrants sent to El Salvador lacked U.S. criminal record*, L.A. Times (Apr. 10, 2025), available at <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2025-04-10/about-90-of-migrants-sent-to-el-salvador-lacked-u-s-criminal-record>.

I hereby declare under penalty of perjury of the laws of the United States that the foregoing is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Executed on 30th of April, 2025, in Silver Spring, Maryland.

/s/ Rebecca M. Cassler
Rebecca M. Cassler

EXHIBIT 1

to Decl. of Rebecca M. Cassler

**ALIEN ENEMIES ACT:
ALIEN ENEMY VALIDATION GUIDE**

In the case of: _____ A-File No: _____

1. The person named above is fourteen years or older: ☐
2. The person named above is not a citizen or lawful permanent resident of the United States: ☐
3. The person named above is a citizen of Venezuela: ☐

If any of these three requirements are not satisfied, the person named above shall not be ordered removed under the Alien Enemies Act (AEA). In such a case, you should consult your supervisor and the Office of the Principal Legal Advisor (OPLA), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and, where applicable, initiate removal proceedings under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).

4. The person named above is validated as a member of Tren de Aragua (TDA), as determined by reference to the following evaluation form:

Instructions: *Complete the following validation evaluation form for each suspected alien targeted for removal under the AEA, or, following apprehension, for each alien potentially subject to an AEA removal.*

After accounting for the two comments below, aliens scoring 8 points and higher are validated as members of TDA; you should proceed with issuing Form AEA-21B, titled, "Notice and Warrant of Apprehension and Removal under the Alien Enemies Act." Aliens scoring 6 or 7 points may be validated as members of TDA; you should consult with a supervisor and OPLA, reviewing the totality of the facts, before making that determination; if you determine an alien should not be validated at this time as a member of TDA, when available, you should initiate removal proceedings under the INA. Alien scoring 5 points or less should not be validated at this time as member of TDA; when available, you should initiate removal proceedings under the INA.¹

Comment 1: Even if 8 points or higher, if all tallied points for an alien are from the Symbolism and/or Association categories (with no points scoring in any other category), consult your supervisor and OPLA before determining whether to validate the alien as a member of TDA (and proceed with an AEA removal) or initiate INA removal proceedings.

¹ A tally of 5 points or less, or any decision to initiate INA removal proceedings, is not a finding that an alien is *not* an Alien Enemy. Relatedly, at any time, additional information may come to light that gives reason to revisit a prior decision to forego an AEA removal.

Comment 2: For purposes of validating an alien as a member of TDA, at least one scoring category must involve conduct occurring, or information received, within the past five years.

Valuation Explanation			
Category	Definition Explanation	Points	
Judicial Outcomes and Official Documents	a. Subject has been convicted of violating Title 18, United States Code, Section 521 or any other federal or state law criminalizing or imposing civil penalties for activity related to TDA	10	
	b. Court records (e.g., indictments, criminal complaints, sentencing memorandums) identifying the subject as a member of TDA, describing specific activity of TDA	5	
Self-Admission	a. Subject self-identifies as a member or associate of TDA verbally or in writing to law enforcement officer, even if that self identification to a law enforcement officer is unwitting, e.g., through lawful interception of communications.	10	
Criminal Conduct and Information	a. Subject participates in criminal activity (e.g., narcotics trafficking, human smuggling, etc.) with other members of TDA, including preparatory meetings and significant incidents directly attributed to TDA	6	
	b. Law enforcement or intelligence reporting identifying subject as a member of TDA, to include Bureau of Prisons validations and reliable foreign partner information.	4	
	c. Credible testimonies/statements from victims, community members, or informants that affirm the subject's membership in or allegiance to TDA.	3	
	d. Detailed open-source media (e.g., newspapers, investigative journalism reports) that describe arrest, prosecution, or operations of a subject as a member of TDA	2	
	e. Subject conducts and/or facilitates business with TDA (e.g., money laundering, mule, service provider)	2	
Documents and Communications	a. Written or electronic communications (e.g., e-mails, letters, texts, secure messages) that discuss business with, and/or are communicating with, known members of TDA; cell phone data contains multiple group, organizational, or organization leaders' or members' information.	6	
	b. Subject conducts phone calls about the business of TDA with known members of TDA	10	
	c. Financial transactions indicating criminal activity for TDA or with known members of TDA	3	
	d. Subject possesses written rules, constitution, membership certificates, bylaws, etc., indicating, together with other conduct, membership of or allegiance to TDA	6	
Symbolism	a. Subject has tattoos denoting membership/loyalty to TDA	4	
	b. Social media posts by the subject displaying symbols of TDA or depicting activity with other known members of TDA	2	
	c. Subject observed tagging or graffitiing to mark the territory of, and the subject's allegiance to, TDA	2	
	d. Subject observed displaying hand signs used by TDA	2	
	e. Subject displays insignia, logos, notations, drawings, or dress known to indicate allegiance to TDA, as observed by law enforcement in person or via virtual mediums	4	

Association	a. Surveillance documentation that a subject is frequently observed closely associating with known leaders and members of TDA	2	
	b. Subject part of group photos with two or more known members of TDA	2	
	c. Subject presently resides with known members of TDA	2	
			Total Points

VALIDATION DETERMINATION

Note: If any of the four requirements are not satisfied, do not complete this validation determination.

Based on the validation guide and instructions above, including Comments 1 and 2, I find that the person named above, _____:

1. Is fourteen years or older;
2. Is not a citizen or lawful permanent resident of the United States;
3. Is a citizen of Venezuela; and
4. Is a member of Tren de Aragua.

Accordingly, the above-named person is validated as an Alien Enemy.

Name of Agent/officer
completing the form

Signature of agent/officer
completing the form

Date

Name of Supervisor

Signature of Supervisor

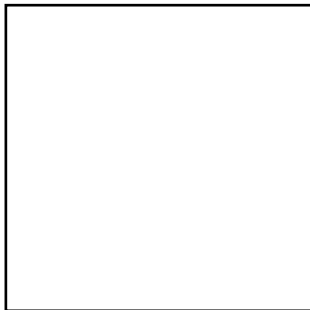
Date

VERIFICATION OF REMOVAL

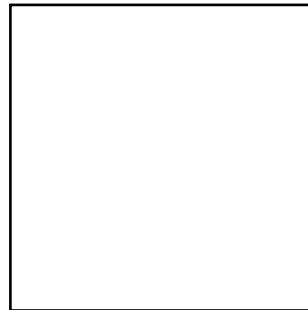
A-number _____ Date: _____

Alien Enemy's name: _____

Departure Date	Port of Departure	Manner of Departure
Signature of Verifying Officer		Title of Officer



Photograph of alien removed



Right index fingerprint of alien removed

(Signature of alien whose fingerprint and
Photograph appear above)

(Signature of official taking fingerprint)

**NOTICE AND WARRANT OF APPREHENSION AND REMOVAL
UNDER THE ALIEN ENEMIES ACT**

A-File No. _____ Date: _____

In the Matter of: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Sex: Male Female

Warrant of Apprehension and Removal

To any authorized law enforcement officer:

The President has found that Tren de Aragua is perpetrating, attempting, or threatening an invasion or predatory incursion against the territory of the United States, and that Tren de Aragua members are thus Alien Enemies removable under Title 50, United States Code, Section 21.

_____ has been determined to be: (1) at least fourteen years of
(Full Name of Alien Enemy)
age; (2) not a citizen or lawful permanent resident of the United States; (3) a citizen of Venezuela; and (4) a member of Tren de Aragua. Accordingly, he or she has been determined to be an Alien Enemy and, under Title 50, United States Code, Section 21, he or she shall immediately be apprehended, restrained, and removed from the United States pursuant to this Warrant of Apprehension and Removal.

Signature of Supervisory Officer: _____

Title of Officer: _____ **Date:** _____

Notice to Alien Enemy

I am a law enforcement officer authorized to apprehend, restrain, and remove Alien Enemies. You have been determined to be at least fourteen years of age; not a citizen or lawful permanent resident of the United States; a citizen of Venezuela; and a member of Tren de Aragua. Accordingly, you have been determined to be an Alien Enemy subject to apprehension, restraint, and removal from the United States. You are not entitled to a hearing, appeal, or judicial review of this notice and warrant of apprehension and removal. Until you are removed from the United States, you will remain detained under Title 40, United States Code, Section 21. Any statements you make now or while you are in custody may be used against you in any administrative or criminal proceeding. This is not a removal under the Immigration and Nationality Act.

After being removed from the United States, you must request and obtain permission from the Secretary of Homeland Security to enter or attempt to enter the United States at any time. Should you enter or attempt to enter the United States without receiving such permission, you will be subject to immediate removal and may be subject to criminal prosecution and imprisonment.

Signature of alien: _____ Date: _____

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

EXHIBIT 2

to Decl. of Rebecca M. Cassler

Homeland Security Investigations

HSI-CHI-24-455



WHAT IS TREN DE ARAGUA?

Tren de Aragua (TdA) is a transnational criminal organization that began as a labor union working in Venezuelan rail yards in the mid-to-late 2000s. TdA rapidly evolved into a gang that specializes in human trafficking, extreme violence, and extortion in the Aragua State of Venezuela. The foundation of the gang and its leadership is based in Venezuelan prisons but has expanded into Mexico, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Guatemala, and Bolivia. The gang is swiftly growing and ramping up recruiting measures to strengthen its presence in the United States. TdA is headed by Héctor Rusthenford Guerrero Flores aka "Nino Guerrero"—his current whereabouts are unknown.

EXPANSION AND CRIMINAL INVOLVEMENT

TdA has continuously made efforts to expand its criminal enterprise into other countries. There are three major steps that are part of its expansion process:

1. **Exploration Phase:** TdA members arrive to a new area via border crossings, migration routes, hotspots, or urban areas with notable Venezuelan populations. TdA members exploit migrants and maintain a low profile while conducting illicit activities.
2. **Penetration Phase:** TdA members enter local criminal economies with low barriers to entry.
3. **Consolidation Phase:** TdA establishes roots in criminal economies, sets up a financial base, and builds criminal structures needed to maintain their illicit activities. This phase usually involves money laundering.

As depicted by a July 2023 InSight crime report (see map to the right), TdA has been involved in a variety of crimes while operating in South America.

More recently, the organization has shifted its focus to establish a presence in the United States. Open source information indicates that TdA members are present in California, Illinois, Florida, New York, Nevada, and Texas and that suspected TdA members may be involved in a variety of crimes to include kidnapping, human trafficking, sex trafficking, organized retail crime, robberies, and document fraud.

Tren de Aragua's Regional Presence and Criminal Economies (2023)



Homeland Security Investigations

HSI-CHI-24-455



DETECTING AND IDENTIFYING

Open source material has depicted TdA members with a combination of the below tattoos:

"Jump Man" Symbol



AK-47s



Trains



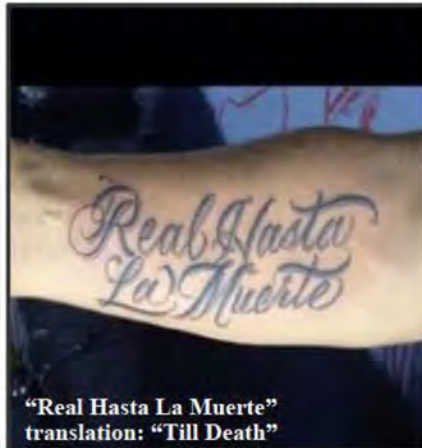
Crowns



"Hijos de Dios" Quote



"Real Hasta La Muerte" Quote



Stars



Clocks



Skull with Gas Mask



ADDITIONAL IDENTIFIERS

Homeland Security Investigations, Chicago Field Office, has obtained additional information to help identify TdA members:

- Typically males in the age range of 18-25 years old;
- Dressed in high-end urban street wear;
- Favor the Chicago Bulls ^{USPER} basketball jersey, specifically Michael Jordan ^{USPER} jerseys with the number "23", and Jordan "Jump Man" footwear/sneakers; and / or
- Often wear sports attire from U.S. professional sports teams with Venezuelan nationals on them.

This product contains U.S. person information that has been deemed necessary for the intended recipient to understand, assess, or act on the information provided. It has been highlighted in this document with the label ^{USPER} and should be handled in accordance with the recipient's intelligence oversight/information handling procedures. U.S. person information should be protected in accordance with constitutional requirements and all federal and state privacy and civil liberties laws.

This is a Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), Chicago Field Division document. For any questions related to this report or to provide additional information, please contact HSI Chicago at (630) 458-7400 or HSIChicagoIntake@hsi.dhs.gov.

EXHIBIT 3

to Decl. of Rebecca M. Cassler

UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY/LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION

U.S. BORDER PATROL

EL PASO SECTOR

THIS INFORMATION WAS PROVIDED BY CBP AND MAY CONTAIN INFORMATION FROM ANOTHER AGENCY. ANY DISCLOSURE OF THIS INFORMATION OUTSIDE OF CBP MAY CONSTITUTE A VIOLATION OF THE THIRD AGENCY RULE. RELEASING ANY INFORMATION TO ANY ENTITY OUTSIDE OF CBP IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED.

Situational Awareness

DATE: 10/02/2023

TDA Gang Recognition Indicators

(U//FOUO/LES) The El Paso Sector (EPT) Intelligence Unit (SIU) HUMINT-Gang Unit continues to see migrants from Venezuela with confirmed and suspected links to the Tren de Aragua (TDA) gang.

(U//FOUO/LES) Intelligence collections have identified the below tattoos on subjects; indicative of possibly being a member or associate of the TDA.

AK-47



Gas Mask/Real Hasta la Muerte



UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY/LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE

UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY/LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE

Stars on the Shoulders:



Trains:



Ismalito:



(U//FOUO/LES) EPT HUMINT-Gang Unit collections determined that the Chicago Bulls attire, clocks, and rose tattoos are typically related to the Venezuelan culture and not a definite indicator of being a member or associate of the TDA.

(U//FOUO/LES) Agents are reminded to remain cognizant of their surroundings at all times and maintain a high level of situational awareness when dealing with subjects with TDA indicators.

This product was prepared by the El Paso Sector Intelligence and Operations Center.
Comments and/or questions may be directed to the El Paso Sector Intelligence HUMINT-GANG Unit EPT_SIU_HUMINT@cbp.dhs.gov.

UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY/LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE

EXHIBIT 4

to Decl. of Rebecca M. Cassler

Trump sent these Venezuelans to El Salvador mega prison. Their families deny gang ties.

miamiherald.com/news/local/immigration/article302251339.html

Syra Ortiz Blanes, Verónica Egui Brito, Claire Healy

March 18, 2025

Immigration

By Syra Ortiz Blanes,

Verónica Egui Brito and

Claire Healy.

| 22



Watch the latest video shared today on President Nayib Bukele's X account, showing over 200 Venezuelan migrants—that the federal government is linking to Tren de Aragua —arriving in El Salvador and being transferred to the country's mega prison. The footage documents their arrival and transfer to the country's notorious prison. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and President Bukele have both confirmed the deportation flights. By El Salvador Presidential Press Office

The day after he was arrested while working at a restaurant in Texas, Mervin Jose Yamarte Fernandez climbed out of a plane in shackles in El Salvador, bound for the largest mega-prison in Latin America.

His sister, Jare, recognized him in a video shared on social media. As masked guards shaved detainees' heads and led them into cells at the maximum-security complex, Yamarte Fernandez turned his gaze slowly to the camera.

TOP VIDEOS

"He was asking for help. And that help didn't come from the lips. It came from the soul," said Jare, who asked to be identified by her nickname because she fears for her family's safety and who added her brother has no previous criminal record. "You know when someone has their soul broken."

[READ MORE: Trump deports hundreds of alleged Venezuelan gang members. Did he defy a court order?](#)

Yamarte Fernandez, 29, is among 238 Venezuelans the Trump administration accused of being gang members without providing public evidence and sent over the weekend to El Salvador's Terrorist Confinement Center, a prison about 45 miles from the capital designed to hold up to 40,000 people as part of a crackdown on gangs. They will be jailed for at least one year, El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele said in a statement on X, following a deal brokered between the two countries in February.



Mervin Jose Yamarte Fernandez, 29, is one of Venezuelans accused by the Trump administration of gang affiliation and sent over the weekend to El Salvador's Terrorist Confinement Center. His sister identified him in a video shared on social media by the Salvadoran government. "He shouldn't be imprisoned in El Salvador, let alone in a dangerous prison like the one where the Mara Salvatruchas are held," his sister told the Miami Herald. El Salvador Presidential Press Office

"These heinous monsters were extracted and removed to El Salvador where they will no longer be able to pose any threat to the American people," White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said.

But families of three men who appear to have been deported and imprisoned in El Salvador told the Miami Herald that their relatives have no gang affiliation – and two said their relatives had never been charged with a crime in the U.S. or elsewhere. One has been previously accused by the U.S. government of ties to the feared Tren de Aragua gang, but his family denies any connection.

Neither the Department of Homeland Security nor Immigration and Customs Enforcement responded to Miami Herald questions about what criteria was used to select detainees sent to El Salvador, what the plan is for detainees incarcerated abroad, and whether the government had defied a federal judge's orders to send them there.

Legal experts have taken the Trump administration to court over the deportations, arguing that the government illegally invoked an 18th century wartime law. On Saturday, a federal judge ordered the government to hold off on the deportations. The Justice Department has said in court filings that the judge's oral order to turn around the planes, after they had already departed, was not enforceable and suggested that the ruling was not applicable outside U.S. territory.

READ MORE: White House says it didn't defy court order on deportations as judge calls hearing

Hannah Flamm, an attorney and acting senior policy director at the International Refugee Assistance Project, a New York-based legal aid and advocacy group, said the Trump administration's use of wartime authorities to conduct deportations is "shocking." She described the weekend's deportations as part of a "campaign of mass deportations and evisceration of the rule of law."

"The Trump administration is pushing the limits to find out what it can get away with, both in the courts and in public opinion," she said.

Families of some of the men sent to El Salvador told the Herald that they feel powerless in the wake of the U.S. government's decision to ship their loved ones off to a prison in a foreign country without due process. For years, the prison has been the subject of investigations by reporters and advocates who have found thousands of innocent people have been jailed there without due process.

"He shouldn't be imprisoned in El Salvador, let alone in a dangerous prison like the one where the Mara Salvatruchas are held," said Jare, referring to the international criminal organization with roots in El Salvador. "There are many innocent people behind bars. And today, my brother is one of them."

Originally Yamarte Fernandez was hesitant to move to the United States, Jare said, but she convinced him to join her in Dallas County to provide a better life for his partner and daughter, who stayed back in their home state of Zulia. Jare said her brother did not have any tattoos because of their Christian upbringing. Tattoos have been used by the U.S. government in the past as an indication of gang affiliation, though experts say that Tren de Aragua members don't have any particular signs that identify their membership.

"I'm in so much pain," said Jare, who lives in Texas. "I never imagined this country would cause so much harm to my family."

'Irregular warfare'

On Saturday, President Donald Trump invoked the centuries old wartime law to allow his administration to arrest, relocate, and deport any Venezuelan citizens over the age of 14 who are Tren de Aragua members.

Best known for its role in interning Japanese immigrants during World War II, the Alien Enemies Act is a 1798 law that has been used only three times before – all during times of war. In his announcement of the order, Trump said that Tren de Aragua is invading the country.

“Evidence irrefutably demonstrates that TdA has invaded the United States and continues to invade, attempt to invade, and threaten to invade the country; perpetrated irregular warfare within the country; and used drug trafficking as a weapon against our citizens,” a statement from Trump said.

Anyone accused of being a member of the gang has no right to challenge the accusation under the Alien Enemies law, which grants the government the power to deport a person without due process or the opportunity to contest the claim. Before the proclamation, the American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit against the U.S. government on behalf of five Venezuelans facing deportation.

The rights organization claimed the law cannot be used against nationals of Venezuela because the United States is not at war with Venezuela nor has Venezuela launched a predatory incursion into the United States. Attorneys said the five men, who were not among those deported on Saturday, had been wrongly identified as gang members and were seeking asylum. At least two of them fled Venezuela in part because Tren de Aragua was persecuting them, according to the lawsuit.

“J.A.V. is not and has never been a member of Tren de Aragua,” attorneys wrote about one of the plaintiffs. “He was in fact victimized by that group and the group is the reason he cannot return to Venezuela.”

Lee Gelernt, the ACLU’s lead counsel on the case, called the use of the Alien Enemies Act “flatly unlawful” in a statement to the Herald. But he said that even if it could be used, the individuals were entitled to due process to show they were not gang members.

“If these individuals are afforded due process it will then be determined whether they are members of the gang but we would caution hesitation before anybody takes at face value the Trump administration’s characterization given the administration’s frequent overstatement about immigrant detainees, including with respect to the individuals sent to Guantanamo over the past month,” said Gelernt.

READ MORE: ‘Give us back our sons’: A look at the Venezuelan migrants Trump sent to Guantanamo

A federal judge issued a ruling blocking the president from deporting the men on Saturday. He also broadened the order to apply to anyone who could be at risk of deportation under the executive order.

At the hearing, he ordered the Trump administration to return any flights that were in mid-air. Flight-tracking data shows that three flights landed after the judge blocked the executive order, according to the Washington Post.

“Oopsie... Too late,” Bukele wrote on X, a post that Secretary of State Marco Rubio later re-shared.

In Monday’s press briefing at the White House, Leavitt said the U.S. is paying \$6 million to El Salvador “for the detention of these foreign terrorists.” That same day during a court hearing, the federal judge questioned the Trump administration to determine whether it had violated Saturday’s injunction.

In an interview with Fox News, Rubio was asked about concerns regarding the lack of concrete evidence confirming that all the individuals deported to the Salvadoran prisons are indeed members of Tren de Aragua. He responded, “If one of them turns out not to be, then they’re just illegally in our country, and the Salvadorans can then deport them from — to Venezuela, but they weren’t supposed to be in our country to begin with.”

Flamm, the International Refugee Project lawyer, said the Trump administration was undermining its own ability to crack down on gangs by deporting the people it is in the midst of prosecuting. The federal government sent MS-13 members to El Salvador over the weekend too, including a top leader of the group who is a defendant in a prominent criminal case in New York

“The U.S. government has gone out of its way to prosecute on terrorism charges precisely in an effort to hold gang leaders to account. But the Trump administration clearly does not actually care about public safety or accountability,” she said.

‘Decision to leave’

Yamarte Fernandez had bought a house in a poor neighborhood in Maracaibo to live with his wife and 4-year-old daughter. But the house needed to be remodeled, the kitchen refurbished, the roof replaced.

He decided to travel to the U.S. to support his family at home and send back his earnings to fix up the house. He made the journey from Zulia to the U.S through the Darien Gap, the dangerous jungle between Panama and Colombia, with 13 other Venezuelans, including three other men from his neighborhood who were detained by ICE the same day he was. He arrived at the border in September 2023.



Mervin Jose Yamarte Fernandez, 29, is one of 238 Venezuelans accused by the Trump administration of gang affiliation and sent over the weekend to El Salvador's Terrorist Confinement Center. His sister

recognized him in a video shared on social media, where masked guards shaved the detainees' heads and escorted them into cells at the maximum-security facility. As the camera panned across the scene, Yamarte slowly turned his gaze toward it. Yamarte's family

But as the Trump Administration started its crackdown on illegal immigration – specifically targeting Venezuelans – Yamarte Fernandez and his family had already decided to self deport later this year.

“We had made the decision to leave the U.S. voluntarily to return to Venezuela,” Jare said. “I wanted to stay until December, but he was determined to leave in September.”

Jare said his brother was a hard worker determined to not burden the U.S. In videos where she recognized her brother in El Salvador, she identified two other men who had traveled with him from their neighborhood in Venezuela.

“We came to this country to work and do things right,” she said. “It’s painful that they blame my brother, and they portray him as a member of the Tren de Aragua. I don’t accept the bad reputation created around my brother.”

Yamarte Fernandez is one of seven siblings from a Christian family in Maracaibo, the capital of oil-rich state Zulia, bordering Colombia, according to his sister. Jare described him as a lifelong athlete who loved soccer and baseball and found ways to be active despite his challenging asthma.

“It’s a lie when they said that he was from the TdA. My brother doesn’t even have a tattoo,” his sister said, explaining that his family doesn’t believe in tattoos because of religious reasons.

‘Speaking to the devil’

On Monday, Venezuelan National Assembly President Jorge Rodríguez called on the legislature, controlled by Nicolás Maduro’s regime, to issue a formal request banning all Venezuelans from traveling to the U.S.

“In the United States, there is no rule of law when it comes to the rights of our migrants,” Rodríguez said during a press conference in Caracas. He also spoke about Venezuelans who were sent to the prison in El Salvador.

“We will go to great lengths, even if it means speaking to the devil, to ensure that Venezuelans are returned to their homeland,” he said.

Venezuelan opposition leader Edmundo Gonzalez, who is recognized by the U.S. and other democratic nations as the real winner of the presidential election held in Venezuela on July 28th, and Maria Corina Machado issued a statement Monday saying that the Tren de Aragua poses a significant “threat to the entire region.”

Machado and Gonzalez expressed support for the measures the U.S. is taking to identify, arrest and prosecute those involved with or supporting the gang. However, they stressed the need for authorities to exercise “extreme caution in administering justice.” They said it is crucial to distinguish between high-level criminals like Maduro and the vast majority of innocent Venezuelans, to prevent the unjust criminalization of Venezuelan migrants.

‘Wait for me’

Another family fears that their relative was also sent to prison in El Salvador, after he had spent several weeks awaiting deportation in Texas.

Gustavo Adolfo Aguilera Agüero, 27, is from the Venezuelan Andes in Táchira, an area bordering Colombia, and had been living in Dallas since December 2023 with his wife. The couple entered the United States using a now-defunct mobile application to schedule appointments with southwest border authorities. Aguilera Agüero’s wife soon found out she was five months pregnant with their first child. Her husband was working installing water pipes on rooftops and his wife found work taking care of children.

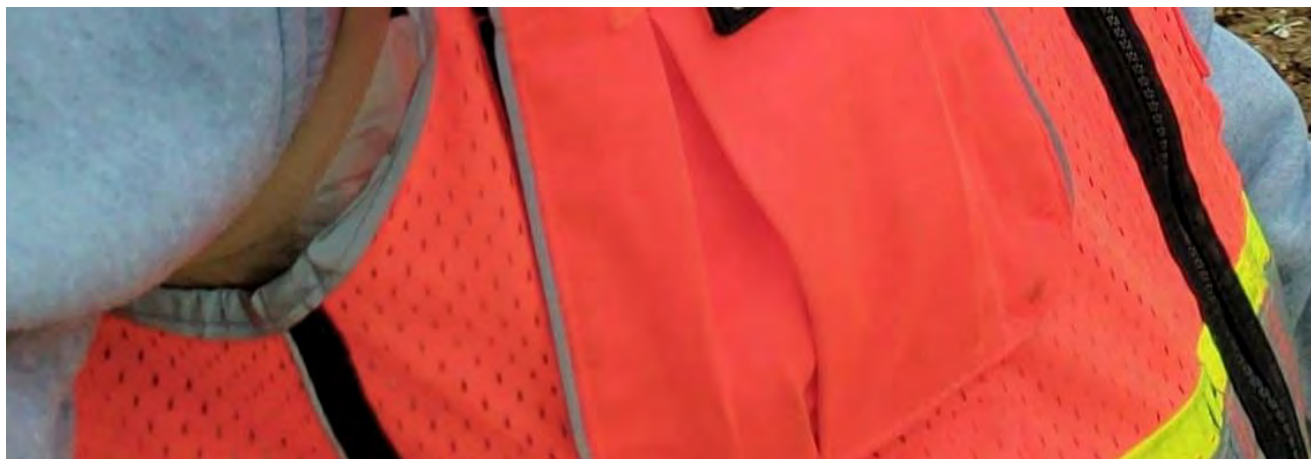
“It hasn’t been easy, but we came together to move ahead in life together,” said his wife, Susej, who asked to only use her first name because she fears for her safety.

In early February, authorities detained Aguilera Agüero while he was taking trash out of his home, his wife said. Authorities had been looking for someone else, she said, but he was taken to Bluebonnet Detention Facility in Anson, Texas.

Aguilera Agüero spent several weeks in detention waiting for a deportation to Venezuela, but his mother, Miriam Aguilera, now fears her son could be among the Venezuelans deported on Saturday to El Salvador instead. The family last heard from Aguilera Agüero on Friday night, when he told his mother he was being deported to Venezuela. A plane from Conviasa, Venezuelan airlines, was going to take him back to his country.

“Mom, we’re going to be deported to Venezuela. Wait for me,” Miriam Aguilera remembered her son telling her.





Gustavo Adolfo Aguilera Agüero, 27, from the Venezuelan Andes in Táchira, had been living in Dallas, Texas, with his wife since December 2023. In early February, Aguilera Agüero was detained by authorities while taking out the trash, according to his wife. Authorities were actually searching for someone else, but Aguilera Agüero spent several weeks in detention, awaiting deportation to Venezuela. Now, his mother, Miriam Aguilera, fears her son may be among the Venezuelans deported to El Salvador on Saturday instead. Aguilera's family

But by Sunday, no plane had arrived in Venezuela, and she saw the deportations to El Salvador on the news. She still doesn't know where he is – and has been scanning videos of the Terrorism Confinement Center in El Salvador looking for him.

Aguilera Agüero has an American-citizen son, Jacob, who is nine months old, and an older Venezuelan son, Santiago. His family denies that he has any connection with Tren de Aragua. According to his mother, her son's tattoos tell a story of love and loyalty: A crown, inked with the name of his first son, Santiago. A star intertwined with his name and his mother's name. Across one arm, the phrase "*Real hasta la muerte*" – "Real until death" – which was made famous by Puerto Rican reggaeton artist Anuel AA.

Public safety authorities in Texas have linked these tattoos to Tren de Aragua and officials are using them to identify suspected members.

"We were told he was arrested because of the tattoos on his neck and arms, but my son doesn't have a criminal record," Miriam Aguilera told the Herald.

One man whose relatives spoke with the Herald has previously faced accusations of gang ties from the Drug Enforcement Administration. His family insists he was wrongfully accused of gang involvement.

'Let us leave'

Henry Javier Vargas Lugo, 32, originally from La Guaira state on Venezuela's coast, had been living in Aurora, Colorado, for nearly a year when he was detained on Jan. 29, and he was later transported to Texas.

Before Vargas Lugo migrated to the U.S., he lived in Colombia for seven years, working as a mechanic in Bogotá. Seeking a fresh start, he decided to leave Colombia and try his luck in the United States.

Vargas Lugo entered the U.S. through El Paso, bringing his daughter and her mother with him. When U.S. Customs and Border Protection encountered him, they asked him to remove his shirt to document his tattoos. Officials inquired whether he was affiliated with a gang, including Tren de Aragua, and he denied any association, according to his sister, Nayrobis Vargas, who spoke with the Miami Herald. He has several tattoos, including crowns with his niece and mother's name, a clock on his arm and a rosary.



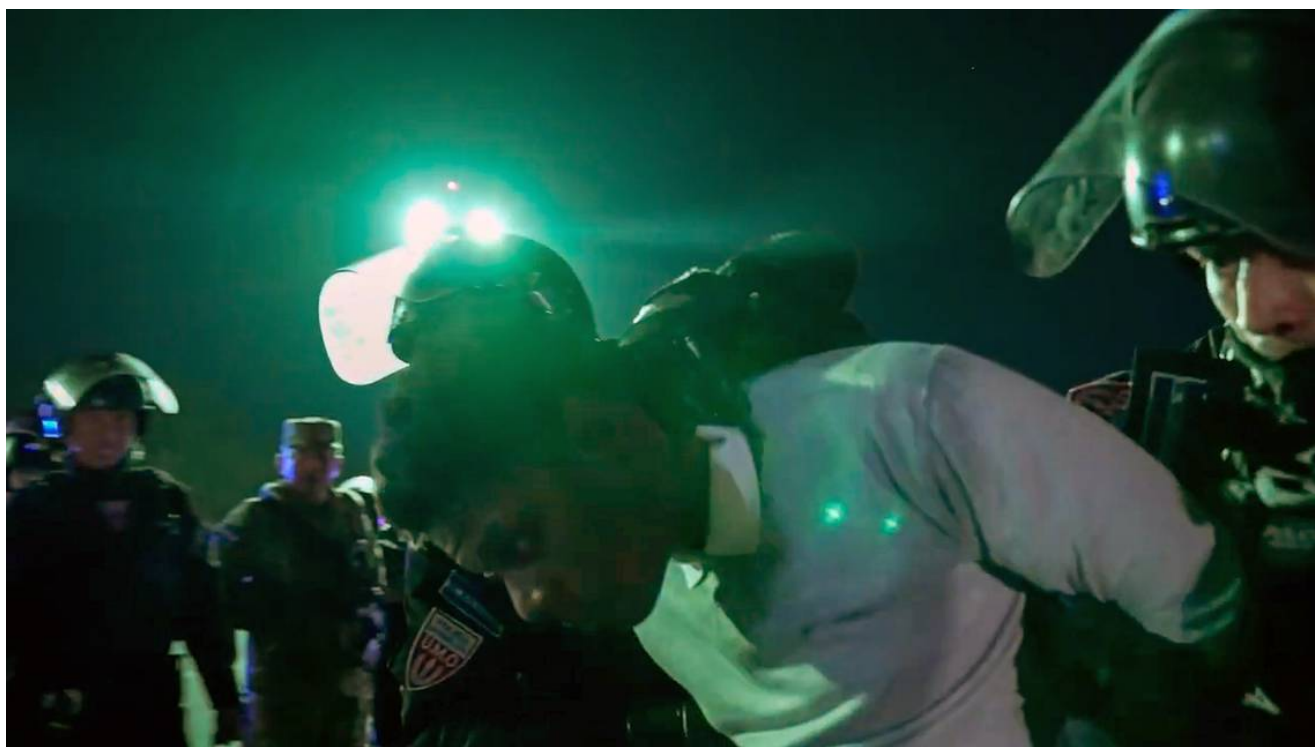
Henry Javier Vargas, 32, originally from Vargas state on Venezuela's coast, had been living in Aurora, Colorado, for nearly a year when he was detained on January 29. Prior to migrating to the U.S., Vargas spent seven years in Colombia, working as a mechanic in Bogotá. Vargas's family was able to identify him in a video posted by Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele, showing the detainees arriving in El Salvador. In the footage, his hands are shackled, and his head is bowed in a moment of despair Vargas's family

In Colorado he worked odd jobs, delivering food and shoveling snow, doing whatever it took to provide for his family, his family said.

He was arrested in Aurora on extortion charges connected to an incident that occurred on the light rail, officials confirmed. He was later released from jail pending an investigation, and his family says that he was the victim of a scam.

The Drug Enforcement Administration – which participated in the arrest – released a photo of Vargas Lugo, identifying him as a member of Tren de Aragua, but hasn't disclosed any evidence. He has yet to be sentenced with a crime.

Vargas Lugo's family was able to identify him in a video posted by Bukele of the detainees arriving in El Salvador. His hands are shackled and his head bowed.



Henry Javier Vargas, 32, originally from La Guaira state on Venezuela's coast, had been living in Colorado for nearly a year when a family member identified him in a video posted by Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele. The footage showed Vargas among the Venezuelans deported to El Salvador's largest mega-prison, the largest in Latin America. In the video, his hands are shackled, and his head is bowed in a moment of despair. El Salvador Presidential Press Office

"The families are devastated and terrified of what might happen to them," said one of his cousins in Venezuela. "I haven't eaten all day just thinking about what they're going through."

Yamarte Fernandez's family is still planning to self deport back to Venezuela. His sister said she does not "blame Trump" because she was "taught not to judge others." But she said that the president's decisions are "reaching extremes that are impacting innocent people."

“Let us leave, but let us leave in a good way,” said Jare, Yamarte Fernandez’s sister. “Not leaving from here and ending up in a prison.”

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Verónica Egui Brito ha profundizado en temas sociales apremiantes y de derechos humanos. Cubre noticias dentro de la vibrante ciudad de Hialeah y sus alrededores para el Nuevo Herald y el Miami Herald. Nacida y criada en Caracas, Venezuela. Se unió al Herald en 2022. Verónica Egui Brito has delved into pressing social, and human rights issues. She covers news within the vibrant city of Hialeah, and its surrounding areas for el Nuevo Herald, and the Miami Herald. Born and raised in Caracas, Venezuela. Joined the Herald in 2022.



SB

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EXHIBIT 5

to Decl. of Rebecca M. Cassler

IMMIGRATION

Despite refugee status in the U.S., young Venezuelan was deported to Salvadoran prison

By Verónica Egui Brito

Updated March 21, 2025 5:34 PM

EQ **Miami Herald**

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A screengrab from a video obtained from the El Salvador Presidential Press Office shows alleged members of the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua, deported by the U.S. government, detained at the Terrorism Confinement Center in Tecoluca, El Salvador, on March 16, 2025. *El Salvador Presidential Press Office*

E.M. and his girlfriend fled persecution in their native Venezuela in 2021 and dreamed of making a new life in the United States.

The young couple spend two years in Colombia before applying for refugee status in 2023 to come to the U.S. Struggling to survive in Colombia, they worked tirelessly in informal jobs, selling food on the streets and making deliveries to make ends meet.

On Jan. 8, after they were finally granted the coveted refugee status, E.M., 29, and his girlfriend, Daniela Palma, 30, finally arrived in the United States, flying into Houston.

Upon arrival, an immigration officer asked the young man the question that changed his life in moments.

“Do you have any tattoos?”

He had already been asked that by U.S. authorities in Colombia as part of an extensive background check, and he now gave the same answer. He lifted his shirt and pants and showed the immigration officer tattoos on his chest, legs and arms — a crown, a soccer ball and a palm tree.

At that point, it no longer mattered that he had no criminal record, and that he had been granted refugee status, with the full legal right to enter the United States. Immigration officials decided the tattoos were evidence enough to suspect he might be a member of Tren de Aragua, a prison-born Venezuelan gang whose members have earned a reputation in Latin America as fearless and ruthless.

E.M., whom the Miami Herald is not identifying by his full name for his safety in case he is forced to return to Venezuela, was detained. His girlfriend, threatened with detention for months herself, agreed to be deported back to Colombia.

E.M. spent the next couple of months in three different immigration detention centers in Texas, his girlfriend said.

On March 15, the Trump administration deported him, along with over 200 other Venezuelans, to El Salvador, where they were promptly imprisoned in a maximum-security facility with a troubling history of violating human rights and where men sleep hundreds to a cell on steel beds with no mattresses or pillows.



A screengrab from a video obtained from the El Salvador Presidential Press Office shows alleged members of the Venezuelan criminal organization Tren de Aragua, deported by the U.S. government, detained at the Terrorism Confinement Center in Tecoluca, El Salvador, on March 16, 2025. *El Salvador Presidential Press Office*

His girlfriend and his family suspected he had been sent to the fearsome prison, the *Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo* — Terrorism Confinement Center, known by its Spanish initials, CECOT. On Thursday, CBS News got its hands on the entire list of all Venezuelans sent to El Salvador. E.M.'s name was on it.

E.M. is not the only Venezuelan granted refugee status in the U.S. who was deported to El Salvador, the Herald has learned; another man, who was detained longer than E.M., shared the same fate. However, his family has chosen to remain anonymous to avoid jeopardizing his safety.

Rebuilding their lives

E.M. fled his country in 2021 with his girlfriend to escape persecution they endured from the government. They had been targeted by authorities and *colectivos* — Venezuelan armed paramilitary groups — in their hometown, his girlfriend said, for exposing government shortcomings and for their efforts to help their local community.

The couple fled to Colombia, which shares a large — and porous — land border with Venezuela.

For the next three years, E.M. and Palma worked to rebuild their lives. E.M. mainly worked in deliveries, navigating the busy streets of Bogota to earn enough to support themselves while awaiting the results of their refugee status application.

They applied for refugee status – a protection granted to individuals who are unable or unwilling to return to their home country due to past persecution or a well-founded fear of future persecution – to enter the United States. They kept out of trouble — neither had a criminal record in Colombia or Venezuela, according to the Colombian National Police and the Venezuelan Ministry of the Interior and Justice.

The next 17 months were filled with background and criminal checks and countless interviews — by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Organization for Migration, and finally U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

During their interview with the U.S. agency in September, an officer asked E.M. and his girlfriend if they had any tattoos. E.M. said he did, his girlfriend said. The

officer didn't raise any alarms, and the tattoos didn't appear to be an issue. After the thorough background checks, the couple was granted refugee status, their future seemingly secured. The dream of starting fresh in the U.S. appeared within reach.

The tattoo question

At George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston, they were screened — and that's when an immigration officer again asked E.M. if he had any tattoos. The immigration officials in Houston said E.M.'s tattoos were similar to those seen on members of Tren de Aragua. That moment marked the beginning of the couple's troubles and separated them from each other, Palma said.

"It's unfair to criminalize every Venezuelan. Having a tattoo or being born in Aragua doesn't make you a member of a criminal gang," Palma told the Herald. She described her boyfriend as a passionate about sports, especially soccer, a gentle man and an entrepreneur.

They had been together for five years, though they had known each other as kids growing up neighbors in a poor town in Aragua state, in central-west Venezuela.

Aragua state is where the infamous Tren de Aragua gang originated. The gang's roots trace back to the infamous Tocoron prison, where its leaders, many of whom were hardened criminals, began organizing and establishing their power.

E.M.'s tattoos were inked more than a decade ago when he was just a boy, E.M.'s uncle, Noel Guape, said.



Alleged members of the Venezuelan criminal organization Tren de Aragua, deported by the U.S. government, detained at the Terrorism Confinement Center in Tecoluca, El Salvador, on March 16, 2025. *El Salvador Presidential Press Office*

Law enforcement authorities in [Texas have linked tattoos to the Tren de Aragua gang](#), using them as a way to identify suspected members. However, experts have said that, unlike many other criminal gangs, TdA members don't have specific, identifiable tattoos.

E.M.'s family is now left in anguish, wondering if he's safe.

"He is the kind of person who illuminated a room just when he walked in," his uncle told the Herald. "He is the life of the party, always bringing laughter and warmth wherever he goes."

Catholic Charities of Dallas had been expecting to help E.M. and his girlfriend transition into life in the U.S. when they learned he had been detained and Palma had been deported.

"The refugee services that our organization provides do not have the power to influence arrival decisions or deportation processes," said Nadia Ahmad Daniali, the case manager in charge of reception and placement of the Venezuelan refugee couple.

During his last call from E.M. a week ago, he told his uncle he knew he was going to be deported. He didn't specify the destination, but the family assumed it would be Venezuela. But as the days passed without word from E.M., and his alien registration number disappeared from the online immigration system, his family panicked. They worried he had been sent to El Salvador, where he had no connections and where his life might be in danger.

Since last Friday E.M.'s family desperately had tried to contact the ICE detention centers where he had been last held in Texas, but no one had been willing to provide any information about his whereabouts. It wasn't until Thursday afternoon they found out he was on the list of the hundreds of Venezuelans sent to El Salvador.

'He is not a criminal'

Several Venezuelans families have told the Herald their family members were deported to El Salvador [despite not having any criminal record in the U.S](#) or elsewhere.

Jerce Reyes Barrios, a professional soccer player from Venezuela, took part in peaceful demonstrations against the Nicolas Maduro regime in 2024. He was detained, tortured with electric shock shock and suffocation. When he was released he fled to the U.S. seeking protection.

Reyes' story was detailed in a court document filed by his attorney, Linette Tobin, in a federal court case in Washington, D.C., where the ACLU is challenging the deportations of the Venezuelans to El Salvador.

Reyes registered with CBP One, a mobile application developed by U.S. Customs and Border Protection that allowed migrants to schedule appointments at ports of entry along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Reyes used the app to secure an appointment and, on the day of his scheduled entry, he presented himself to CBP officials, but his tattoos raised alarms. He was detained and sent to the Otay Mesa Detention Center near San Diego. Despite

having no criminal record in Venezuela, no links to gangs and no history of violence, Reyes was treated as a criminal, his lawyer said.

After applying for asylum in December 2024, he was deported to El Salvador last week without any notice to his lawyer or family, his attorney said. His loved ones were left in the dark, wondering what had become of him.

Reyes and E.M. were deported with another 236 Venezuelans the same day the Trump administration invoked the Alien Enemies Act, an 18th Century law that had been used only three times in history — all during times of war or invasion. Under the law, Trump asserted the power to arrest, relocate or deport any Venezuelan over 14 from what the U.S. considers an “an invasion.”

The law strips individuals accused of gang membership, like Reyes and E.M., of their right to challenge the accusation. The government maintains it can deport them without due process.

“My boyfriend is not defined by a tattoo or his birthplace. We want justice for him,” Palma said. “We are going to prove he is not a criminal.”

This story was originally published March 21, 2025 at 5:00 PM.

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IMMIGRATION

Administration: ‘Many’ Venezuelans sent to El Salvador prison had no U.S. criminal record

March 18, 2025 7:52 PM

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Trump sent these Venezuelans to El Salvador mega prison. Their families deny gang ties.

March 18, 2025 5:30 AM



Verónica Egui Brito

el Nuevo Herald



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Verónica Egui Brito ha profundizado en temas sociales apremiantes y de derechos humanos. Cubre noticias dentro de la vibrante ciudad de Hialeah y sus alrededores para el Nuevo Herald y el Miami Herald. Nacida y criada en Caracas, Venezuela. Se unió al Herald en 2022. Verónica Egui Brito has delved into pressing social,

EXHIBIT 6

to Decl. of Rebecca M. Cassler



WORLD & NATION

They were called gang members and deported. Families say their only crime was having tattoos



Venezuelan Vice President Delcy Rodríguez, center, attends a rally Tuesday in Caracas to protest the imprisonment of Venezuelans in a Salvadorean jail. Hundreds of people marched through the capital to demand the release and repatriation of 238 Venezuelans sent by President Trump to a prison in El Salvador, accused of links to the El Tren de Aragua criminal gang. (Juan Barreto / Getty Images)

By Patrick J. McDonnell, Kate Linthicum, Mery Mogollon and Nelson Rauda

March 23, 2025 3 AM PT

- Relatives of a Venezuelan deported to El Salvador say his tattoo isn't a sign of gang membership. It supports his favorite soccer team.
- "The United States now has a tropical gulag," says one expert of the Trump administration's agreement with El Salvador to imprison deportees.

SAN SALVADOR — One is a former professional soccer player who, according to his lawyer, fled Venezuela after being tortured by the country's authoritarian government.

The other, also from Venezuela, is a onetime shoe salesman and social media influencer who documented his journey from South America on TikTok.

Both were apparently among thousands of political asylum aspirants who entered the United States from Mexico legally via an immigration process scrapped by the Trump administration.

Both were detained, one in California, and deported. Now they are imprisoned in El Salvador, according to their families, who have been left in the dark about their fates in a penal system widely condemned for human rights abuses.

"This has been a torture for us, an injustice," said Antonia Cristina Barrios de Reyes, mother of Jerce Egbunik Reyes Barrios, 36, the former professional goalkeeper. "My son is not a criminal."



Jerce Egbunik Reyes Barrios, a former professional soccer player from Venezuela, was among the alleged gang members deported from the United States to El Salvador. “My son is not a criminal,” his mother said. (Family of Jerce Reyes)

The social media influencer is Nolberto Rafael Aguilar Rodríguez, 32. He initially fled to Colombia, Venezuela’s western neighbor, out of desperation, said his sister, Jennifer Aguilar.

“We’re *campesinos*, we come from the fields,” she said. “We left Venezuela because we were starving.”



WORLD & NATION

Stranded in Mexico City, these migrants hoping to reach the United States have no good options

Jan. 26, 2025

Reyes Barrios and Aguilar were among 261 people — the vast majority Venezuelans — expelled to El Salvador last week after the Trump administration alleged that most were affiliated with the Venezuela-based [Tren de Aragua](#) gang, which President Trump has declared a terrorist group.

The evidence of gang membership cited by the government is typically flimsy to nonexistent, defense lawyers allege, and largely based on tattoos and social media postings.

Experts say the administration’s outsourcing of detained migrants to a nation with an infamously repressive prison system has no precedent.

In El Salvador, “the United States now has a tropical gulag,” said Regina Bateson, a political scientist at the University of Colorado Boulder. “The notion that the U.S. government is paying millions of dollars to another government to violate these people’s rights is horrifying.”



WORLD & NATION

This French film about Mexico has 13 Oscar nominations. Why ‘Emilia Pérez’ is tanking in Mexico

Feb. 1, 2025

The El Salvador operation is part of a deal between the Trump administration and [Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele](#). Advocates have filed a federal lawsuit challenging Trump’s use of the Alien Enemies Act — a statute from 1798 previously only invoked during wartime — to expel most of the alleged Venezuelan gang members.

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On Friday, a federal judge in Washington, D.C., vowed to “get to the bottom” of whether the Trump administration [defied his order](#) to hold off on the deportations while lawsuits challenging the expulsions played out in court.

Many relatives of the deportees deny their kin have gang ties or a criminal record, saying they were simply searching for better lives or escaping persecution in their turbulent homeland, part of the exodus that has seen millions flee Venezuela.

“We have no idea what’s going to happen to Jerce,” said Jair Barrios, uncle of the soccer player. “We understand and respect the laws of each country; but at the same time, we ask that, please, let justice be done and truly innocent people be released.”

Reyes Barrios was detained at the Otay Mesa border post in California in September, according to a statement from his attorney, Linette Tobin, when he appeared for his appointment under the Biden administration program known as CBP One, which [facilitated U.S. entry](#) for prospective asylum applicants and others.

According to Tobin, he was mistakenly accused of Tren de Aragua affiliation based on an arm tattoo and a social media post in which he made a hand gesture that U.S. authorities called a gang sign.

The tattoo — a crown atop a soccer ball, with a rosary and the word “Díos” — is actually an homage to his favorite team, Real Madrid, Tobin wrote. The hand gesture is a popular sign language rendering of “I Love You,” the lawyer added.

Reyes Barrios participated in antigovernment demonstrations in Venezuela in February and March 2024, Tobin wrote, and was subsequently arrested and tortured, enduring electric shocks and suffocation. After his release, he fled for the United States and registered for CBP One while in Mexico.

Tobin portrayed Reyes Barrios as a law-abiding person who had never been charged with a crime and wrote that he had “a steady employment record as a soccer player, as well as a soccer coach for children and youth.”

Once in custody in California, Tobin wrote, Reyes Barrios applied for political asylum and other relief. A hearing had been set for April 17 at immigration court in Otay Mesa.

Reyes Barrios was deported to El Salvador on March 15.

Tricia McLaughlin, assistant secretary for the Department of Homeland Security, defended the government action.

Reyes Barrios was “not only in the United States illegally,” McLaughlin wrote on X, “but he has tattoos that are consistent with those indicating TdA [Tren de Aragua] membership. His own social media indicates he is a member of the vicious TdA gang.”

She added that “DHS intelligence assessments go beyond a single tattoo and we are confident in our findings.”

Reyes Barrios is a “respected person” in Venezuela, said his wife, Mariyen Araujo Sandoval, who has remained in Mexico with two of the couple’s four children.

“It’s unjust to criminalize someone because of a tattoo,” said Araujo, 32. She said she recognized her husband in the online videos of Venezuelans expelled to El Salvador.

Now dashed, she said, is her family’s dream of a reunion in the United States. She now hopes for a reunion in Venezuela — if her husband can ever get out of El Salvador.

“I’m too scared to even try to go to the United States,” said Araujo, who noted that she also has a tattoo, of a rose. “I’d be afraid that they would separate me from my daughters and put me in jail.”

The Venezuelans dispatched to El Salvador have no legal recourse for appeal or release, attorneys say, and may face indefinite detention.

“There is, of course, no law, rule or judicial standard in El Salvador to outsource the prisons,” said José Marinero, a Salvadoran lawyer. “These people have ... no conviction, no debt to the Salvadoran justice system.”

Their predicament, activists say, highlights the erosion of democracy across the region, as well as the dramatic crackdown on migration pushed by Washington.

“There’s no real safe haven left,” said Michael Ahn Paarlberg, a political scientist who studies Latin America at Virginia Commonwealth University.



An image provided by El Salvador's presidential press office shows prison guards overseeing deportees at a facility in Tecoluca on March 16. (Associated Press)

The Trump administration has acknowledged that many of those deported under the Alien Enemies Act have no criminal records in the United States. But the government says they may still pose a threat.

“We sent over 250 alien enemy members of Tren de Aragua, which El Salvador has agreed to hold in their very good jails at a fair price that will also save our taxpayer dollars,” Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who brokered the deal with Bukele, declared on X.

Critics say that Trump, like Bukele, invokes crime as an excuse for suspending civil liberties.

“They’re using these particularly vulnerable people as test cases,” said Paarlberg, who added that the message appears to be: “If we can deport people who don’t have criminal records, people who are fleeing a regime that pretty much everyone and the U.S. government agrees is authoritarian, then we can deport anyone.”

Bukele, a former advertising executive who labels himself “the world’s coolest dictator,” dispatched video crews to record the arrival of the Venezuelans, who were led off deportation planes in shackles and had their hair shorn.

“This is a performative act of cruelty ... to scare people into not coming, to scare people who are here without papers, to scare people away from protesting,” Paarlberg said.

News of the deportations has sent relatives of the expelled Venezuelans poring over videos and social media posts in an effort to determine if their loved ones were among those flown to El Salvador.



A photo provided by El Salvador's presidential press office shows prison guards transferring deportees from the U.S. to the Terrorism Confinement Center in Tecoluca on March 16. (Associated Press)

The names of the deported Venezuelans appeared on a list leaked to the media. Included was Aguilar, who garnered more than 40,000 followers as he documented his northbound trek from South America on TikTok. His feed included images from the treacherous Darien Gap, the dense jungle separating Colombia and Panama.

Jennifer Aguilar described her brother as a hard-working family man who fled Venezuela for Colombia in 2013. He has three children: an 11-year-old girl in Venezuela and a 4-year-old girl and boy, 2, in Colombia. Aguilar's sister says he got his tattoo, of playing cards and dice, to cover up a scar on his forearm from an accident he had at age 16.



Nolberto Rafael Aguilar Rodríguez, 32, is one of hundreds of Venezuelan migrants detained in the U.S. and sent to El Salvador. (Jennifer Aguilar)

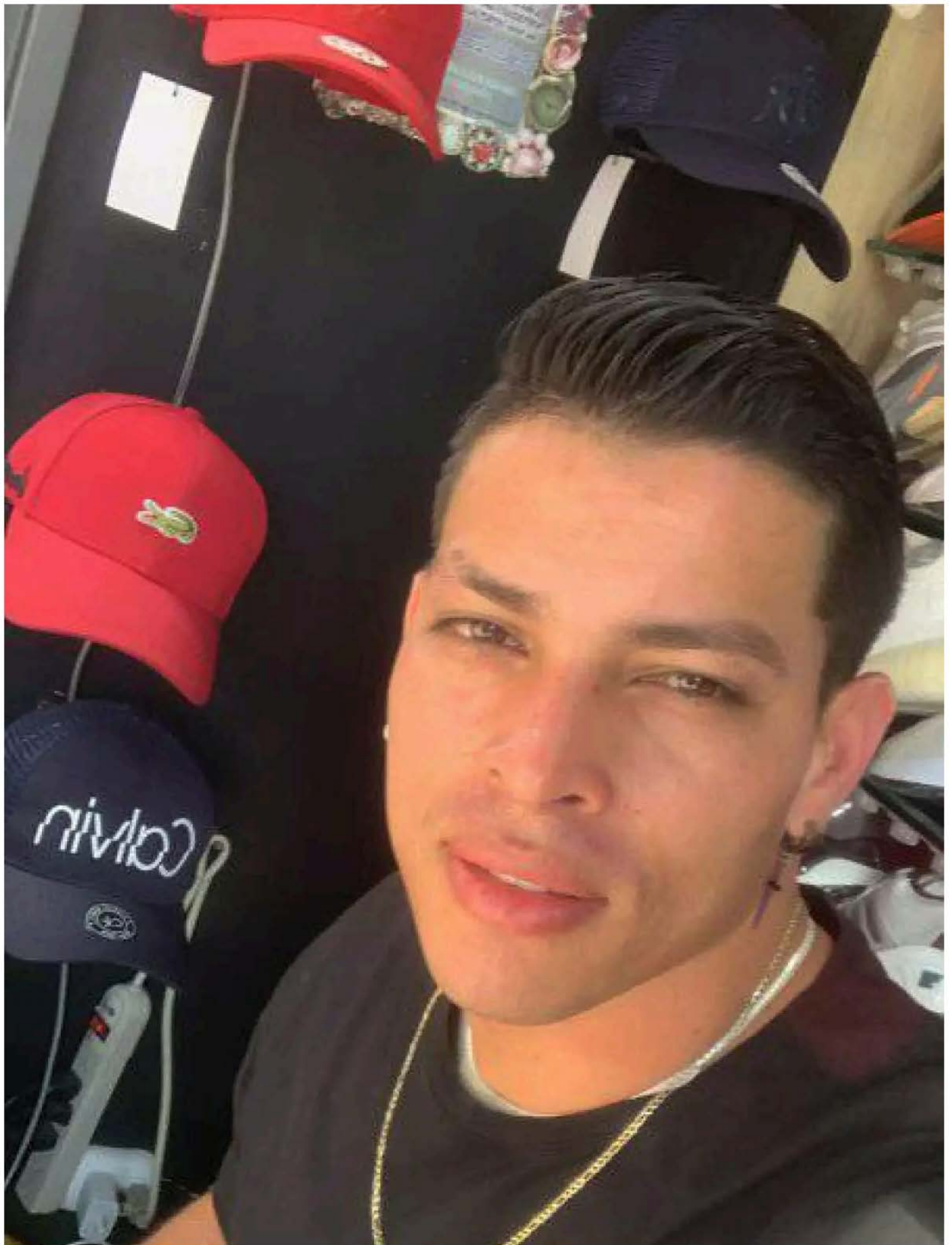
According to his sister, Aguilar made his way to Mexico and secured an appointment for U.S. entry via [CBP One](#). On June 24, he posted a video of himself boarding a plane, apparently en route to the U.S.-Mexican border.

“Have faith in God,” he wrote in a caption. “Never put your head down. And trust yourself.”

Jennifer Aguilar said he got a job in a travel agency in the California border city of Calexico. For reasons that remain unclear, he was detained by U.S. immigration authorities late last year.

From Colombia, where she lives with her three daughters, Jennifer Aguilar has written about her brother's plight on social media and sent messages to Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and to Bukele, the Salvadoran leader.

Aguilar "has never been to prison in Venezuela or in Colombia," she wrote to Bukele. "Believe me, if he was guilty I'd say: 'Leave him there.' Because we were taught to be honest and do good."





Nolberto Rafael Aguilar Rodríguez chronicled his journey from South America to the United States on social media. He was deported and is now being held in El Salvador. (Jennifer Aguilar)

“I’ve tried by all means ... to be Rafael’s voice,” said the sister, adding that she doesn’t know anyone in El Salvador. “If I could be there, I would. I’m deeply sorry that I can’t.”

El Salvador has rounded up and imprisoned some 85,000 people — the equivalent of 1.5% of the nation’s population — since March 2022, when Bukele declared a state of emergency that effectively suspended constitutional due process rights. The Venezuelans were dispatched to the infamous Center for Terrorism Confinement, the centerpiece of Bukele’s mass incarceration agenda.

Times staff writers McDonnell and Linthicum reported from Mexico City while special correspondents Mery Mogollón and Nelson Rauda contributed, respectively, from Caracas, Venezuela, and San Salvador. Special correspondent Cecilia Sánchez Vidal contributed from Mexico City.

More to Read

The Tren de Aragua gang started in a Venezuelan prison. It’s now deep in U.S. politics

March 18, 2025



EXHIBIT 7

to Decl. of Rebecca M. Cassler



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VENEZUELA >

Arturo and Frizgeralth, convicted for being Venezuelans: Trump takes another step in his racist drift

Families recognize their loved ones in videos from the Salvadoran prison where the US deported nearly 300 people with alleged ties to the Tren de Aragua gang. Some have clean criminal records. No one knows if they'll be able to return home



SuarezVzla is the stage name of the reggaeton artist Arturo Suárez-Trejo from Venezuela.
CORTESÍA

CARLA GLORIA COLOMÉ | FLORANTONIA SINGER

New York / Caracas - MAR 24, 2025 - 10:26CET



Dart Martins, a Peruvian reggaeton artist in a hurry to record his song TXTEO, can't believe he has to delay it because SuarezVzla isn't there. They've been making music together for a long time. Last time they were on a stage was at the Urban Fresh Festival in Santiago, Chile, in front of a young, loud audience. A video captures the memory of that April night: Dart Martins at the front of the stage, singing; SuarezVzla in the back, the audience in front, doing [perreo](#). Earlier this year, when SuarezVzla had already left Chile to settle in the United States, they exchanged a few messages. Donald Trump had not yet [returned to the White House](#).

“How’s it going in the United States?” Martins, 30, asked in one of his messages. “I heard Trump is deporting all the illegal immigrants.”

SuarezVzla — the stage name of Arturo Suárez-Trejo, 33 — told him it was true, that they were going to deport [many illegal migrants](#), but that everything was fine with him. He had left his native Venezuela in 2018 and had settled in Chile. There he made music, friends and fans. On September 2, 2024, around 1 p.m., he entered the United States after presenting himself at the San Ysidro border crossing in California. He had benefited from the CBP One program, the application created by the Joe Biden administration and dismantled by the Republican administration on its first day in office, which has allowed legal entry into the country to some 900,000 immigrants.

SuarezVzla left Venezuela in 2018 and settled in Chile. On September 2, 2024, he entered the United States after presenting himself at the San Ysidro border crossing in California.

CORTESÍA

Suárez wanted to improve his musical technique and return to Chile with his wife. He had the protection of a parole program and a hearing scheduled for April 2 of this year. He won't be able to go: he now finds himself in El Salvador. He met the same fate as the 238 Venezuelans who were taken there last week in a dystopian story: expelled from the United States under a two-century-old law in violation of a court order and [taken to a maximum-security prison for terrorists](#) built by Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele.

On February 8, Suárez was recording a video clip at a home in Raleigh, North Carolina, where he lived. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents arrived and arrested the entire group of people. They first held him at the Stewart Detention Center in Georgia. They then transferred him to the Valle Detention Center in Texas. At one point, he told his family he was being deported to Venezuela.

"We thought this was going to happen, they were going to deport him to Caracas," says his brother, Nelson Suárez-Trejo, 35, who describes Suárez as a noble man, a lover of music and poetry, who has never thrown a punch beyond his kickboxing practices.

Days after Suárez's last call, the nightmare began. The images of the inmates, shaved, handcuffed, and sent on three flights to El Salvador as alleged members of the Venezuelan criminal gang Tren de Aragua, were shocking. They zoomed in on one and there was no doubt: it was Suárez.

"We knew it because of the tattoos he has and his physical features," his brother says.

No one has provided any information or warning to the family. Confirmation didn't come until Thursday, when CBS News published an internal U.S. government list of the names of the 238 Venezuelans who were sent to the Central American country, despite a judge's order preventing the deportation. The name Arturo Suárez-Trejo appears on the list. To this day, the family remains unaware of what will happen to him.

"We haven't received any response from the Salvadoran government. We don't even know what charges he faces. He had no criminal record," his brother says.

Suárez's family, friends, and fans have been circulating documents on social media confirming that he has no criminal record in any of the countries where he has lived. Dozens of people have shared his photos, his videos perched on a stage, and his love songs. They have united to demand justice for someone they describe as "a fundamental pillar of Santiago's emerging cultural scene." Suárez "is an artist, not a criminal," they assert.

"He doesn't deserve to have his life ended, to have his name tarnished," his brother insists. "I don't understand how they can cut short the dreams of someone who came to this country to dream big and who didn't enter illegally. We're affected; we're not Tren de Aragua, we're not even from Aragua."

Nelson would also like to know "how he is, how they are treating him" in prison. It's the same question being asked by Nathali, Sánchez's wife, who has been struggling with so much concern for almost a week. "In the Texas prison, he was coughing blood and had a fever. I'm afraid it could get worse," says the 27-year-old, who cares for their daughter, a baby born just three months ago. "I won't rest until I see him free, until I see him with his daughter."

Following a wave of condemnation over the deportation of dozens of men considered criminals to El Salvador, U.S. authorities have acknowledged that not all of them are members of the aforementioned gang and that some do not even have a criminal record in the United States. Several officials told CBS News that 137 of the Venezuelan men sent to the Salvadoran mega-prison were treated as "enemy aliens," but that 101 were deported "under ordinary immigration procedures." Organizations such as the United Nations have focused on the way these migrants are being treated. Its Secretary-General, António Guterres, called for respect for "due process, their fundamental rights, and their most basic dignity."

Now, Suárez's brother, Nelson, is the one who will have to take care of the baby and his wife, who remain in Chile. "She doesn't have the means to work three months after giving birth. She's alone, and now I, as his brother, have to take care of them." But the thing is, Nelson is also afraid to go out on the streets. He's [an Amazon delivery driver](#); he has to work. His papers are in order, but nothing guarantees that the same thing that happened to Suárez won't happen to him. "I'm also terrified of being stopped. I have my TPS, my court date, and my

license, all in order, but who knows. I walk the streets in fear because I also have tattoos, but I don't belong to any gang; all I've done my whole life is work."

Guards look after deportees from the United States at the Anti-Terrorist Detention Center in Tecoluca, El Salvador, on March 16, 2025.

AP

The party that wasn't in Venezuela

At the Cornejo Pulgar home, high in the Antímáno neighborhood in western Caracas, blue and yellow balloons were placed a week ago. This was how they were planning to welcome Frizgeralth De Jesús, 25, the youngest of the children who would be returning to the country, the only one who still has a huge baby portrait hanging in the living room. The deportation was the best news for his family, after the young man had spent eight months in a detention center in Texas. At home, they were happy, his older brother Carlos says from Caracas.

They were planning to go greet him at the airport that Saturday, after he told them he was happy and about to board the plane home.

Last year, Frizgeralth had made a long journey [through the Darien Gap](#). He waited for his appointment to apply for temporary residence through the now-defunct CBP One application, a benefit that Venezuelans had until last year. His deadline was June 19, 2024. Meanwhile, he was making plans to open a store in the United States to sell the streetwear brand he started in Venezuela. “He was going to look for something better,” says Carlos. That something ended up being a prison as soon as he crossed into the United States. He was with three friends, another one of his brothers, and his brother’s girlfriend. They were headed to Tennessee, where another of his sisters has lived for seven years. Venezuelans have been migrating en masse for a decade now. Now, almost all of them have a place to call home.

Frizgeralth was the only one of his group who wasn’t allowed to enter. [The tattoos](#) on his neck, chest, abdomen, arms, and legs became the unwritten reason that led to his being declared a suspect when he tried to enter the country in June 2024. He had been in custody ever since. Now he’s also gone missing. His family hasn’t seen him in the videos Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele released celebrating the agreement with the United States to provide jailer services. But they deduced he’s in that group. Now, his name on the published list confirms it.

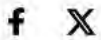
During his eight months in prison, Frizgeralth spoke mostly with his sister, who lives a 12-hour drive from where he was detained. In a message she still has, the young man told her: “I never imagined being in prison just for getting tattoos.” Tattoos are part of the style he identifies with, that urban, very hip-hop, very American fashion that led him to start his own clothing brand and for which he was ultimately arrested. “This is mental torture every day,” he wrote in another message.

His sister has considered buying a ticket from Tennessee to El Salvador, not knowing if she’ll be able to see him. Carlos also tried to find information at the march that Nicolás Maduro’s government organized this week in solidarity with their families. The head of the National Assembly, Jorge Rodríguez, compared U.S. immigration policy to the Nazi persecution of Jews sent to concentration camps during World War II, and promised to do whatever was necessary to

bring them to Venezuela. But Carlos found no answers about his brother. “The truth is, I spent the entire march crying.”

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A tattoo, an ear, a neck: Venezuelan mothers recognize their sons in images of alleged gang members sent to El Salvador

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EXHIBIT 8

to Decl. of Rebecca M. Cassler

Immigration

They were arrested during routine ICE check-ins. Then they disappeared.

Deportation proceedings are often shrouded in secrecy. But lawyers say the lack of information about the Venezuelan migrants deported under the Alien Enemies Act is nearly unprecedented.

Updated March 22, 2025

Nays Ñaupari Rosila shows a photo of herself and her husband, Henry Albornoz Quintero, who was detained by ICE.
(Desiree Rios/For The Washington Post)

By [Arelis R. Hernández](#) and [María Luisa Paúl](#)

SAN ANTONIO Henry Albornoz Quintero's family had been tracking his whereabouts through an online detainee locator ever since he was arrested and put in deportation proceedings after a routine check-in with immigration officials in late January.

But on Friday — less than a week before the expected birth of his son — the Venezuelan man disappeared from the database.

"Your search has returned zero (0) matching records," the government website states.

The families and lawyers of dozens of other Venezuelan and Salvadoran men who had been detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement say their relatives and clients have similarly disappeared over the past week, with no explanation provided by the government over where they may be.

Deportation proceedings in the United States are often shrouded in secrecy. Arrest records are not public, and detainees can be transferred to far-flung jails anywhere in the United States. But family members, lawyers and the public can get information on an inmate's whereabouts through an online database, contact with an official or direct phone communication with a detainee.

Yet in the week since the Trump administration invoked the Alien Enemies Act to deport 137 Venezuelan migrants accused of being Tren de Aragua gang members to a mega-prison in El Salvador, detainees can no longer be found in the database. The Trump administration cast them as violent threats against Americans, though a top ICE official admitted in a court filing that “many” of those deported under the act do not have criminal records in the U.S. A lawyer advocating for those sent to El Salvador said in court Friday that his team would soon file documents that show some of the migrants deported there were rejected by the prison because they were women or from countries other than Venezuela or El Salvador.

Government prosecutors have offered little or no information about the migrants who were left there. Lawyers have gone to court dates for bond and asylum hearings, only to find that their clients are missing. Relatives have been left to scrutinize images released by the Salvadoran government showing men being frog-marched off a plane in shackles into the prison, to find out if they are there.

“This looks like the kinds of things we thought only happened in other countries, and it’s happening to people who come from those places and came here to get away from it,” said Michelle Brané, a former Biden appointee who is among a group of lawyers working to identify detainees who may have been sent to El Salvador. “You’re not supposed to have people disappear in the United States.”

The White House and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security have not released the names of the men sent to El Salvador and did not respond to questions regarding when family members or lawyers will be notified. Press secretary Karoline Leavitt said at a briefing Monday that the names were not being released “because of privacy concerns at this point in time — that doesn’t mean we won’t.”

Do you know someone who was sent to El Salvador?

The Washington Post is trying to learn more about those being detained in El Salvador. If you know — or think — that your loved one is one of those involved, we would like to hear from you. You can send us information [at this link](#).

The Washington Post está intentando obtener más información sobre las personas detenidas en El Salvador. Si sabe o cree que su ser querido está entre las personas afectadas, nos gustaría saberlo. Puede enviarnos información a través [de este enlace](#).

Lawyers of those likely to have been sent to El Salvador say the lack of information around these men is nearly unprecedented. They described a scrambled quest to find out where their clients are that has thus far yielded few answers. Some called ICE detention centers and were told that the detainees about whom they were inquiring were no longer there, but officials weren’t able to say where they are now.

“It’s like being completely stonewalled,” said Lucia Curiel, who is representing a Salvadoran man who she said has no criminal convictions and disappeared from ICE’s detainee database after the Alien Enemies Act was invoked.

Communicating with the migrants sent to El Salvador and offering them legal representation is likely to be extremely difficult. Inmates at the prison where they were sent are routinely denied access to lawyers or relatives.

The families of 19-year-old Anyelo Sarabia González and 24-year-old Francisco Javier García Casique shared similar stories. Their relatives had been in regular contact with them before they disappeared last weekend. Their family members believe they have spotted them in photos taken of prisoners at El Salvador's Terrorism Confinement Center, but they have no official information on where they are or why they were taken there.

For Alborno Quintero's family, the search for information has been anguishing. His wife, Nays Ñaupari Rosila, is nine months pregnant. She said she has repeatedly called Salvadoran authorities but has not been able to get through to anyone. When she went to the Dallas ICE office looking for answers, she said she was told to leave or risk arrest.

"I'm so scared for my baby," Ñaupari Rosila, 22, said, sobbing. "Unfortunately, we came to a country where basically we don't have a right to anything."

'This isn't Venezuela'

The three men whose families spoke with The Washington Post are all young Venezuelans who settled in north Texas. All had been in the United States for about a year after illegally crossing the Rio Grande and surrendering to U.S. Border Patrol. They were released into the country while they pursued asylum claims and were required to attend regular check-ins with ICE.

Anyelo Sarabia González was "the baby of the house," said Solanyer Michell Sarabia González, 25, his older sister. The siblings, along with another sister, crossed into the U.S. in November 2023. They were told to check in with ICE once a year and it was during one of those check-ins in January that an officer began asking questions.

Solanyer said an ICE official took interest in a tattoo on her brother's hand showing a rose with petals made of \$100 bills. He'd only recently gotten the tattoo, she said. Their mother had forbade him from getting one in Venezuela. Because her brother was now helping her pay the bills, "I felt like I couldn't say no when he asked. God, I even helped him pick it. We thought it was just a cool design."

The official asked where Anyelo was from, said his sister, who also had an appointment that day and witnessed what transpired. When he said he was from La Victoria, in the Venezuelan state of Aragua, that "was the nail in the coffin," she said. He was taken to another room and told to strip naked. His sisters got on their knees and begged the official to deport them instead.

For more than a month, Solanyer and her brother stayed in contact regularly by phone. She tried reassuring him that everything would be fine. She reminded him that he had an asylum hearing coming up in May.

"Don't cry. This isn't Venezuela," she told him. "They have a justice system here."

Francisco Javier García Casique had also been detained while trying to comply with a routine ICE check-in during February of last year. His brother, Sebastián García Casique, said one of the officers looked at his arms — sprawled with tattoos of a compass, a crown, a single rose, and his mother's, grandmother's and sisters' names — and began asking questions.

“They saw that and they decided he was Tren de Aragua,” Sebastián said. “They didn’t care that he had never been arrested before — neither in Peru, Venezuela or the United States — and told him that they needed to investigate him more.”

Sebastián said his brother was detained for several months last year. Though Sebastián said authorities could not link Francisco to any criminal activity, he was nonetheless ordered deported. But that didn’t happen. A judge released him with an ankle monitor because, at the time, the U.S. did not have a deportation agreement with Venezuela and the court decided he didn’t pose a security threat, his brother said.

“Francisco just kept telling us: ‘I have nothing to fear because I’m not a criminal,’” his brother recalled. Then in February, officials showed up at Francisco’s home and sent him to a detention center. “It was bittersweet for him, but he kept saying that his only wish was to be sent back to Venezuela.”

Albornoz Quintero and his wife had just celebrated their first year in the U.S. when he went to the ICE check-in where he was detained. He is a mechanic by training and had managed to find repair jobs while waiting for a work permit. The couple initially made ends meet by sleeping in a car but eventually earned enough money to put a deposit down on an apartment in Dallas.

Both were elated when they learned she was pregnant, Ñaupari Rosila said.

She had no issues at the check-in, but an officer detained her husband without providing any explanation. The expectant mom — then seven months pregnant — got in touch with an attorney and began raising money for him to be released on bond. A hearing was scheduled for the same week that she was due.

But a few days before, Albornoz Quintero told his wife he was going to be deported back to Venezuela. The other men whose families spoke with The Post say their loved ones also said they were going to be sent home.

In Texas and Venezuela, relatives anxiously searched for information on their flights. They were disappointed, but the men were also eager to be out of jail and back with their families, even if it was in the place they’d risked everything to leave. Francisco’s relatives cooked his favorite foods and prepared a homecoming celebration.

Then they disappeared.

Pushing legal boundaries

On the same day the men last called their families, President Donald Trump had invoked a wartime provision designating members of the Tren de Aragua gang as alien enemies eligible for immediate deportation.

The next day, March 15, they were boarded onto planes as a court battle began brewing over whether the president had the right to deport the men under the act. Five men named as plaintiffs in the case were removed from the planes, but the others departed and were in the air when a federal judge ordered that they be turned around. The planes landed in El Salvador several hours later anyway.

Greg Chen, senior director of government relations for the American Immigration Lawyers Association, said there appears to have been an information breakdown between immigration officials in Washington and local ICE officials, who do not appear to have received adequate instruction about what is happening and what to do next.

“There’s operational chaos,” he said.

The situation echoes ICE’s early days after its founding in 2003, when entering immigration detention was like “entering a black hole,” said Ohio State University law professor César Cuauhtémoc García Hernández. “People would die in detention, and ICE wouldn’t inform anyone.”

But several immigration lawyers said the agency had become more transparent in recent years, after several embarrassing investigative reports and lawsuits. ICE regularly made detainees available for court, granted some legal access, facilitated phone calls and in 2020 created the locator system in response to pressure from advocacy groups. Anyone with a detainee’s basic details could learn where that person was being held.

That wasn’t the case, however, when the Trump administration began sending migrants to the Guantánamo Bay naval station in Cuba. When families of those migrants searched the ICE locator for information on their loved ones, they were told to call a Florida field office. The agency only updated the locator with a specific “NSGB” label after the advocates brought a lawsuit earlier this year, ACLU attorney Eunice Cho said.

If the system does not offer a location, the likely scenario is that the detainee is no longer in ICE custody. That person could be dead, or in the case of the alleged Venezuelan gang members, out of the country.

“We are in a situation where ICE is pushing the boundaries of what it is legally permitted to do,” García Hernández said. “ICE is trying to act aggressively in making headway on President Trump’s promise of overseeing a mass deportation campaign and making use of every legal tool available with little regard to norms or practices or the effect removal has on the people who care about that individual.”

The Trump administration has wavered in justifying its decision to land two planes carrying Venezuelan migrants deported under the Alien Enemies Act. High-ranking Trump administration officials have argued the president’s executive authority supersedes the judge’s order, while in court his lawyers have argued that because the planes were over international waters, the ruling did not apply.

‘Freedom and rights?’

Dallas attorney John Dutton logged on to Albornoz Quintero’s bond hearing this week through the virtual Webex platform. His client did not. The lawyer asked a government prosecutor where the expectant father was.

The Trump administration attorney said he did not know, Dutton said.

“The judge suggested that I contact the Salvadoran Consulate,” in the event that he was indeed in El Salvador, Dutton recalled. If that was the case, the judge noted, he wasn’t sure if he had any jurisdiction over the case anymore.

“Can you imagine just being taken ahead of what is supposed to be one of the most exciting days of your life, the birth of a child, and being put in a foreign prison designed for terrorists?” Dutton said. “This kid is screwed.”

With no information from lawyers, families are resorting to amateur sleuthing — zooming in on blurry photos, studying every image, and freezing frames of videos shared by the White House and Salvadoran government to confirm whether their brother, father, son or spouse are among those spirited away to a foreign prison.

Sebastián García Casique found his brother in a photograph. The blurry image featured dozens of men in formation, with their heads shaved and wrists bound behind them. Sebastián zoomed in on every bald head. Then he saw them: the tattoos, the ears, the broad frame he had known his whole life.

Still, hoping to be wrong, Sebastián checked the ICE locator website. Until March 15, it showed his brother was still in Texas. By Sunday night, that had changed. Now it indicated that his search yielded no results.

“The worst part is that they don’t even have the courtesy of calling the families,” Sebastián said. “It’s inhumane how they’re literally disappearing people. What happened to being the country of freedom and rights?”

Solanyer Sarabia González was also bewildered when she spotted her little brother among the prisoners in El Salvador.

“I kept thinking to myself: ‘How in the world will I ever recognize him now among all these bald guys?’” she said. Then she recognized him. “Those are the knees, shoulders, forehead I’ve known and loved forever.”

For Albornoz Quintero’s wife, finding him in a photograph was an official confirmation that he will not be at his child’s birth. Ñaupari Rosila has tried to keep her mind focused on the baby, arranging and rearranging the baby’s corner of their one-bedroom apartment. Most of the walls in their unit are bare, except for where the baby’s crib is, which she has decorated with a dinosaur sticker.

The closet is full of baby clothes that her husband had excitedly picked out.

Graphics by Álvaro Valiño. Silvia Foster-Frau contributed to this report.

What readers are saying

The comments express strong opposition to the use of the Alien Enemies Act for deporting individuals without criminal records, drawing parallels to authoritarian regimes and historical instances of "disappearing" people. Many commenters fear this sets a dangerous precedent for... [Show more](#)

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