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November 23, 2020

The Honorable Joseph V. Cuffari  
Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
2707 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20528

Tony H. Pham  
Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Director  
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement  
1500 12th St., SW  
Washington, D.C. 20536

Dear Inspector General Cuffari and Mr. Pham:

I write to urge the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of the Inspector General (OIG) to investigate a complaint alleging Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers' use of pressure and excessive use of force to coerce asylum seekers to sign deportation and travel documents at the Adams County Correctional Facility in Natchez, Mississippi. The complaint also questions the authenticity and validity of the immigration documents that these individuals signed. Furthermore, I urge ICE to halt deportations of these individuals until this investigation is complete.

On October 7, 2020, advocacy groups submitted a complaint to ICE, the DHS Office for Civil Rights & Civil Liberties, and the DHS OIG detailing the accounts of eight Cameroonian asylum seekers in the Adams County Correctional Center.<sup>1</sup> The complaint alleges that ICE officers and contract employees used pepper spray, physical restraints, and other use of force measures to obtain the signature or fingerprint of detainees on deportation and travel documents to remove them from the U.S. These allegations are deeply disturbing and detail gross violations of ICE detention standards, U.S. law, and civil and human rights.

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<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a33042eb078691c386e7bce/t/5f7f17f39e044f47175204fb/1602164723244/Re+CRCL+Complaint+ICE%27s+Use+of+Torture+to+Coerce+Immigrants+to+Sign+Immigration+Documents+at+Adams+County+Correctional+Facility.pdf>

The reports of coercion and insufficient travel documentation call into question the authenticity and validity of the ICE deportation process. According to the complaint, the Cameroonian Embassy in the U.S. explicitly denied issuing necessary travel documents to allow these detained immigrants to return to the country they fled. The embassy determined some of the documents used by ICE were invalid, raising the question of whether the deported individuals were able to return to their country of origin.

In light of these allegations of egregious human rights violations taking place at U.S. immigration facilities, I request that you respond to the following questions by December 15, 2020:

1. When did DHS and the Department of State become aware of the allegations of coercion and excessive use of force by ICE officers to obtain the signatures of the asylum seekers?
2. What investigative and disciplinary actions were taken after news of these allegations?
3. What were the consequences to the ICE and contracted officers in question?
4. What office within ICE or DHS authorized and directed these protocols? Does DHS plan to investigate the command climate that created an environment where this type of behavior was tolerated?
5. Advocacy groups assert that instances of abuse continue at ICE facilities and are reported via anonymous hotlines. Has DHS completed a comprehensive review of all facilities to determine if there are allegations of abuse similar to those from the Adams County Correctional Center at that or any other ICE centers across the country?
6. Please detail the scope, length, and results of any investigations, at the Adams County Correctional Center or other offices at ICE and DHS, that may be occurring in relation to this incident.
7. Will DHS and the Department of State commit to halt the removal of Cameroonians until a fair, thorough, and transparent investigation into the allegations outlined in this complaint is complete?

Thank you for your urgent attention to this deeply troubling matter.

Sincerely,



U.S. Senator Michael F. Bennet