
END CHILD DETENTION FROM THE US TO PALESTINE

The following collection of articles was inspired by a rally to end child detention held on November 20, 2019 by the Justice for Palestine committee in coalition with Unchained and the Syracuse Immigrant and Refugee Defense Network.

CHILD DETENTION IN OCCUPIED PALESTINE

by Jonathan Brenneman

The US not only imprisons children in inhumane conditions within and along its border but supports such mistreatment around the world. The most glaring example is the military, financial, and political support for the Israeli military's systemic abuse of Palestinian children. Israel is the only country that automatically prosecutes children in military courts, prosecuting over 500 Palestinian children a year without fundamental fair trial protections. The abuses are rampant, as I saw firsthand when doing unarmed civilian accompaniment with Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) in the Palestinian city of Hebron.

CPT patrols checkpoints near the school to make sure children and teachers are not harassed by Israeli soldiers. On a patrol as Palestinian children walked to school through a maze of Israeli military checkpoints, we got a call that something was happening at another checkpoint. When we got there, we saw Palestinian children being dragged into police vehicles and carted off to the station. Twenty-seven Palestinian boys had been arrested. They were as young as six. The oldest were only 15. An Israeli soldier explained the situation, "Someone was throwing stones at this checkpoint, and this is the reason they are arrested now." The soldier paid no mind that he had arrested innocent people, or that they were minors.

The children were interrogated without adult representation. The kids were handcuffed and blindfolded, which is not uncommon—95% children are handcuffed and 86% are blindfolded according to Defense for Children International. After seven hours the children who were considered "minors" were released. (According to Israeli law a Palestinian is only a minor up to age 12, but Israelis are minors up to 14.) The boys over 12 were moved to a military compound, and after five more hours of interrogation all but three were released. Those three were sent to a military prison.

The children were held for over a week without seeing a judge (if they were Israeli children they would see a judge in less than 12 hours). Even then most trials for Palestinians last less than five minutes. Less than 2% get a full evidential trial, and over 99% are convicted! It is commonly known among Palestinians that the only way to get out of jail is to admit whatever the Israelis want you to admit. Children have pleaded their innocence yet were still held for months with no trial. False confession is their only way out. Israeli authorities hold all the power and will do whatever they want to these children. Verbal abuse, humiliation, intimidation, denial of rights, placement in stress positions, and solitary confinement are all common practices.

Jonathan Brenneman worked with CPT in Palestine from 2012-2014.



A Palestinian schoolchild dragged by Israeli soldiers (in the event described here). Photo: International Solidarity Movement

Our tax dollars fund this abuse. Every year \$25 of each US taxpayer's taxes go to the Israeli military. This money has basically no checks on it, enabling the Israeli military to use it for child detention. Today there is a bill in congress to change this. H.R. 2407, "The Promoting Human Rights for Palestinian Children Living Under Israeli Military Occupation Act," would prohibit US military funds from supporting detention, interrogation, abuse or ill-treatment of children. You can support this important legislation by joining SPC's effort to support the national No Way to Treat a Child Campaign.

CHILD DETENTION IN SYRACUSE/NEW YORK STATE

by Emily NaPier Singletary

New York State only stopped sending 17-year-olds to adult jails and prisons on October 1, 2019, and only stopped the same abhorrent practice with 16-year-olds on October 1, 2018.

Prior to landmark legislation referred to as Raise the Age taking effect on those dates, New York State automatically prosecuted any 16- or 17-year-old child charged with a crime as an adult. This sent nearly 28,000 children every year through adult courts, and those who were detained pretrial or sentenced to incarceration were caged in adult jails and prisons. Many of these children were branded with an adult criminal record for the rest of their lives. More than 70% of the 16- and 17-year-olds arrested across New York State, and more than 80% of those sentenced to incarceration, were Black or Brown due to overzealous policing and prosecuting. Raise the Age was passed in 2017 in large part due to the organizing and advocacy of formerly incarcerated youth, their parents and other loved ones,

continued on next page

Emily NaPier Singletary is the Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director of Unchained, a Syracuse-based organization that organizes and advocates to dismantle the carceral state. She leads the organization with her husband Derek who is currently serving a 20-year state prison sentence.



Syracuse teenagers and allies advocate for Raise the Age legislation at the New York State Capitol in March of 2016. Photo: Raise the Age NY.

faith leaders, legal providers, and other concerned community members. Under the new law, most cases involving 16- and 17-year-olds will be handled in family court, and if detained or incarcerated, the teenagers will go to youth facilities.

Prior to Raise the Age being passed, in 2014 the Criminal Justice Task Force of the Alliance of Communities Transforming Syracuse (ACTS) launched a campaign after discovering that 16- and 17-year-olds in Onondaga County jails were routinely placed in solitary confinement for weeks or even months at a time. Partnering with other organizations in Central New York, the campaign successfully forced the Onondaga County Legislature to unanimously pass a resolution in September 2017 banning the solitary confinement of youth held in any facility in Onondaga County.

This resolution and the subsequent Raise the Age law protect children in Onondaga County jails and juvenile detention centers from the terror of solitary confinement and the horror of adult jails. However, a loophole still exists allowing children from Onondaga County and the rest of the state to be held in solitary confinement in prisons known as Adolescent Offender Facilities (none of which are located in Onondaga County). These facilities are run by the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (which manages adult prisons), where solitary confinement is still permitted. During the 2019 legislative session, the leadership of the New York State Senate and Assembly capitulated to Governor Cuomo's objections to a bill that would ban solitary confinement in these adolescent prisons and adult prisons across the state, and they refused to bring the bill to a vote. This act of cowardice was especially egregious because the HALT (Humane Alternatives to Long-Term) Solitary Confinement Act (A.2500/S.1623) had enough co-sponsors in both the Senate and the Assembly to pass, even if no other legislators voted in favor of it.

Unchained is organizing support for the HALT Solitary Confinement Act and engaging in court watching to monitor the implementation of Raise the Age to ensure that 16- and 17-year-olds are treated appropriately under the new law. To get involved in these efforts, contact Emily NaPier Singletary at emily@weareunchained.org or 315-243-5135.

FROM PALESTINE TO MEXICO: FAMILY SEPARATION AS A WEAPON OF WAR AGAINST INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

by Fabiola Ortiz Valdez

At the southern border, the Trump administration has been separating families who are fleeing violence and seeking protection in the US and placing thousands of their children in detention camps. Detained children are separated from their families and are classified as "unaccompanied alien children" even if they come with their parents, who are later charged criminally for unlawful entry. The impact that family separation has on children is immense: trauma, disrupted development, and neurological damage. Some of the parents are lucky enough to be reunited with their kids but are later heartbroken because their children don't recognize them. Yes, some fortunate parents have been reunited with their children, but many more have died in the hands of immigration agents. Just to mention a few painful names: Darlyn (age 10), Juan (16), Jakelin (7), Felipe (8), Wilmer (2), Carlos (16), Marilee (20 months). Like them, many more have died while crossing the border.

For those who are able to request asylum, policies like the Migrant Protection Protocol (MPP) enacted by Trump, force people to return to Mexico while they wait for their case to be heard, putting them in extreme danger at the hands of the narco death squads and the Mexican military. If a family is fortunate enough to make it across the border, the nightmare continues because ICE has been terrorizing communities and showing up at homes, work, daily commutes and continuing to separate children and parents with false claims of child endangerment.

Like the children in Palestine, children at the Mexico-US border are being hunted down, caged, abused, and murdered in their own land. The Americas are lands of the indigenous. California, Texas, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico and Nevada once belonged to Mexico, but were taken by the US. And now children that come from families like my own who ended up on the other side of the border, and children that come from indigenous families that have inhabited this land long before any of us, are being imprisoned in their homeland.

What is happening to immigrant children is not up for debate. There is no nuance, no matter of "needing better immigration policies." Family separation is a war weapon. Israel's child detention policies and the US immigration system are weapons used to displace and essentially murder indigenous people.

We could say that separating families, banning refugees, putting children in cages, undermining human rights, and restricting due process have all made a broken and outdated immigration system worse. But what we as immigrants know, and have always known long before Trump, is that this system is designed to do exactly what it is doing.

Our struggle is a long one. Our fight is not to repair a broken immigration system. It is to build a new and just one from the ground up. 🕊

Fabiola Ortiz Valdez is an organizer with the NY Immigration Coalition.