

URGENT ACTION

STOP SEPARATION OF FAMILY SEEKING SAFETY

On 21 March 2025, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), unlawfully detained and separated a Venezuelan family with active and valid Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and pending asylum applications, after they were ordered released by a federal judge on charges of “illegal” entry to the United States, signed by a Texas judge more than two years after their arrival at the southern U.S. border. Everyone has the right to seek asylum, regardless of their manner of entry into the US, and detaining anyone with valid TPS is illegal. We call the Trump administration to immediately release the parents to reunite with their young children and cease the cruel practice of family separation.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Todd Lyons,
Acting Director, Immigration and Customs Enforcement
500 12th St SW
Washington, DC 20536, USA
Email: Todd.M.Lyons@ice.dhs.gov

Dear Mr. Lyons,

I urge you to immediately release Cesar and Norelia (A#s 246149580 & 246149581) back to their three young children. On 21 March 2025, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Washington, DC, USA, unlawfully detained and separated a Venezuelan family with active and valid Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and pending asylum applications, after they were ordered released by a federal judge on charges of “illegal” entry to the United States, signed by a Texas judge more than two years after their arrival at the southern U.S. border.

This is one of the first times that the United States has used 8 U.S.C. 1325, the provision of immigration law that was the basis for the Trump administration’s family separation policy in its first term, to target a family that has been in the United States for years, rather than recent arrivals at the US-Mexico border.

This is a blatant and outrageous subversion of the law being used to target immigrants and separate families that have already built lives in the United States. Everyone has the right to seek asylum. People should be given prompt access to fair and efficient asylum procedures, and under international refugee law, cannot be penalized due to irregular entry into the country where they are seeking protection. Once granted TPS, an individual cannot be detained on the basis of their immigration status in the US.

Young children watched their parents being taken away in handcuffs and thrust into a system that inflicts violence and prolongs their suffering. Separating asylum-seeking families causes long lasting trauma, particularly in children, can amount to torture, and is a flagrant breach of their human rights.

I urge you to immediately change course and release Cesar and Norelia back to their young children, and end the practice of family separation, family detention, and mass detention and deportations.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In recent weeks, President Trump has unleashed a series of actions that dehumanize, criminalize, and cause real suffering to people who have fled human rights crises to seek safety. Across the country, the Trump administration continues to implement increasingly cruel and shocking tactics to strike fear in communities, separate and detain families, and target activists and beloved community members.

On 21 March 2025, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Washington, DC, USA, detained and separated a Venezuelan family with Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and pending asylum applications, after they were ordered released by a federal judge on charges of “illegal” entry to the United States, signed by a Texas judge more than two years after their arrival at the southern U.S. border.

Cesar and Norelia, their three children under the age of 12, and other extended family members fled Venezuela where they were persecuted because of their support for the opposition party in the country. They entered the US in 2022 through Texas. The entire family has pending asylum applications, along with valid and active TPS for Venezuela. TPS allows individuals from certain countries experiencing dangerous conditions to legally reside and work in the United States. Once granted TPS, an individual cannot be detained on the basis of their immigration status in the US.

Cesar and Norelia had previously been arrested by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) on 11 March 2025. On 12 March, a federal judge ordered that they be released from custody, pending a court hearing that was scheduled in Texas. On 13 March, Cesar and Norelia were taken from the jail to the federal court in DC where they were released and immediately detained by ICE. ICE released them later that same day. Since then, Norelia and Cesar had been complying with their ICE check-ins until they were arrested again on March 21. Cesar is currently detained at the Farmville Detention Center and Norelia at the Caroline Detention Center.

The Trump administration has recently begun using 8 U.S.C. 1325, the provision of immigration law that was the basis for the Trump administration’s family separation policy in its first term, to target individuals and families that have been in the United States for years, rather than recent arrivals at the US-Mexico border. Cesar and Norelia’s case is precedent-setting as it could affect thousands of other individuals who entered the United States irregularly but were granted legal protections.

All individuals have the universal human right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution and serious human rights violations. All individuals also have the right not to be returned to places where their life or freedom may be endangered or where they would be at risk of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, regardless of their migration status. This principle, known as *non-refoulement*, is a protection under customary international, human rights, refugee, and humanitarian law, and requires states to refrain from returning, removing or transferring anyone in any manner whatsoever to their countries of origin or any other location where there are substantial grounds to believe they would be at risk of serious human rights abuses. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has [called](#) on States to ensure that Venezuelans are not deported, expelled or forced to return to Venezuela. Amnesty International has [called](#) for an absolute ban on all deportations of individuals to Venezuela given that the country is experiencing a situation of massive human rights violations. The 1951 Refugee Convention recognizes that the seeking of asylum can require refugees to breach immigration rules and indicates that people seeking safety should not be subject to specific requirements or suffer penalties or discrimination for this reason. States cannot exclude an individual from refugee status until their claim has been adequately evaluated and individuals cannot be penalized or excluded from refugee status based on their manner of entry into the country in which they are seeking international protection.

Moreover, family separation causes long lasting trauma, particularly in children and is a flagrant breach of their human rights. Amnesty International has previously [determined](#) that immigration policies of separating families can amount to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment because they cause severe mental suffering. The Trump administration must immediately change course and release Cesar and Norelia back to their young children, and end the practice of family separation, family detention, and mass detention and deportations.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 24 June 2025
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Cesar (he/him), Norelia (she/her)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: N/A