



WORKING TO IMPROVE THE LIVES AND DEFEND THE
RIGHTS OF REFUGEE AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED WOMEN,
CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

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Hutto Settlement a Good First Step; Lack of National Family Standards and Alternatives to Detention Remain a Concern

New York, NY, August 28, 2007 -- The Women's Commission is pleased that the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE) has agreed to make more improvements in conditions at the T. Don Hutto Residential Center in Texas but remains concerned that finding alternatives to detention for families is not a priority.

"This is certainly a step in the right direction and we are happy that ICE has responded to some of the recommendations in our report," says Michelle Brané, author of the Women's Commission's February 2007 report on family detention, [Locking up Family Values: The Detention of Immigrant Families](#). "But overall, Hutto is still an inappropriate facility for children, and alternatives to detention should be considered for families, as they are in adult immigration cases."

Some of the improvements for which the Women's Commission advocated which were implemented by ICE include: more appropriate education for children; allowing toys in the cells and making plush toys available for the first time to the youngest kids; improved medical and mental health services; and more freedom of movement.

As a result of the lawsuit filed by the ACLU and the University of Texas, ICE has committed to numerous other improvements including increased privacy, implementing family detention standards at the facility within four months and allowing access to Legal Orientation Presentations. These changes will mark significant progress towards ensuring that families fleeing persecution and seeking refuge in the United States are treated humanely and have access to legal counsel. "We look forward to ICE's development of these standards and expect that they will include child and family welfare provisions," Brané says.

The settlement, which parties expect to be approved by a judge today, covers only the T. Don Hutto facility in Texas and does not address concerns regarding the use of family detention as national policy, nor does it take into account conditions at other existing or future facilities. The Women's Commission had found families detained for as long as 2 years at the Berks Family Shelter Care Facility in Pennsylvania.

"We look to Congress to address these remaining issues through legislation," says Brané. "We remain concerned that the detention of families is inappropriate and urge Congress to ensure that ICE pursues alternatives to detention which are infinitely more appropriate for families with children."

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