

In Parents' Own Words: Documenting the Stories of Separated Families in Honduras

***"All one could see was women crying because their children were taken from them. ...
We were all crying on the plane, all of us, thinking about our children."***

(38 year-old mother separated from her five year-old child)



We are in the midst of a new family separation crisis.

Since assuming office in January, the second Trump administration has actively pursued a variety of detention and deportation practices that tear parents from their children and leave them at risk of long-term, even permanent separation.

Over six days in late November 2025, the [Women's Refugee Commission \(WRC\)](#) and [Physicians for Human Rights \(PHR\)](#) traveled to Honduras, where [approximately 300 people are being returned every day](#), to speak with people immediately after their deportation from the United States. Our delegation spoke with service providers, doctors, psychologists, government officials, and newly arrived deported adults who had just disembarked from deportation flights. Through interviews with dozens of adults who arrived without their children, WRC and PHR learned the nature of the family separation crisis currently unfolding.

In contrast to prior years, [when most deportees were individuals who had been detained while trying to cross the border, the majority of returnees with whom we spoke were longtime US residents](#). Many of their children are US citizens. **Of the parents we spoke to, more than half had been deported without being given an opportunity to bring their children with them.** Some of them described that, despite their efforts, they were unable to obtain basic information about their children's location or care.

In some cases, we spoke with mothers who arrived in acute distress because they had been unable to speak with their children or the person caring for them. One father, who had been apprehended by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at work while his children were at home with a babysitter, had been able to make a telephone call while in the US to make temporary childcare arrangements. One mother, who had been deported without being given the opportunity to bring her two month-old child, a US citizen, back with her, could talk of little more than her frantic desperation to have her newborn baby back.



In Parents' Own Words

“Desde el lunes me lo quitaron, y mi cipote depende de mí en todo. Él es discapacitado. ... Ni sabe que me deportaron. La única que lo cuida soy yo. Yo me lo quiero traer, pero nunca me preguntaron si podía traérmelo.”

“On Monday they [ICE] took him away from me, and my little boy depends on me for everything. He is disabled. ... He doesn't even know that I was deported. The only one who takes care of him is me. I want to bring him with me, but they never asked me if I could bring him with me.”

What we saw violates longstanding US policy to preserve family unity.

Since 2013, the US government has maintained a “parental interest policy,” or set of guidelines for ICE officers on how to protect parents and children during immigration enforcement. Since it was first issued, the policy has been rescinded and reissued three times, with varying degrees of protection.

On July 2, 2025, the Trump administration rescinded the Biden-era [“Parental Interests Directive”](#) and issued a new policy, [called Detained Parents Directive](#) (2025 Directive). The [2025 Directive significantly reduces ICE's obligations](#) around detained parents. It also reduces their obligation to provide assistance to parents facing deportation who want to make arrangements for their children.

However, the 2025 Directive maintains [two requirements](#) that ICE must follow when detaining or deporting an immigrant parent:

- ICE is required to ask any person they detain if they have children.
- ICE is required to allow parents facing deportation to decide whether they want to bring their children with them or have them remain in the US.

WRC and PHR's documentation in Honduras reveals that ICE is not following these requirements. Most parents interviewed said that ICE never asked whether they had children when they were arrested or at any point before their deportation. Many reported asking officers for help or for information about their children yet receiving none. Some had even signed written statements expressing their wish to be deported with their children, yet were removed alone.

Once a parent is deported without the ability to bring their child with them or make safe arrangements for their child to remain in the US with a trusted caregiver, the barriers to reunification become extraordinarily high. Countries receiving thousands of returnees each month, including Honduras, do not have the infrastructure and resources to support parents who are trying to navigate custody, locate their children, or rebuild contact across the borders. The sudden withdrawal of US Agency for International Development (USAID) and other US funding has also [had a catastrophic impact on the humanitarian organizations that provide necessary support to returning migrants in Honduras](#).

When the US government separates parents and children, without sufficient attention to policies, processes, and procedures, separations can be long-term, even permanent.

In Parents' Own Words

“Nunca me preguntaron nada, es que allá lo callan a uno, no lo dejan ni hablar. Ya de entrada lo tratan como que uno es culpable, como que es un criminal. Y mire que nosotras nunca habíamos tenido problemas, estábamos bien limpias. Es que no me preguntaron nada. No hablaban conmigo, sólo para gritarme, pa’ humillar. Nunca me dijeron, ‘Tienes una hija, la puedes traer,’ porque yo hasta de pronto la hubiese traído a [place in Honduras], ella es bien pegada a mí.”

“They never asked me anything, it's just that they shut you up there, they don't even let you talk. From the outset they treat you as if you are guilty, as if you are a criminal. And look, we had never had problems, we were very clean. They didn't ask me anything. They didn't talk to me, just to yell at me, to humiliate me. They never told me, 'You have a daughter, you can bring her,' because I would have brought her to [place in Honduras], she is glued to me.”

(22 year-old pregnant woman separated from her two year-old daughter)

Almost eight years after the first Trump [administration's “zero-tolerance” family separation](#) policy, which separated more [than 5,000 children from their parents as they crossed the US-Mexico](#) border without sufficient tracking mechanisms to ensure that they could later be reunified, [more than 1,000 families remain separated to this day](#).

Caught in the middle of mass immigration enforcement are children. Children are **traumatized by being left behind without one or both parents**, while parents arrive in a country in which they have not lived for years, grief-stricken and terrified that they may never see their children again.

Families belong together. After sitting with these parents and documenting their stories, WRC and PHR urge the US government to ensure that the necessary protections and procedures are in place to ensure that parents can make decisions about what happens to their children. We must also invest in receiving countries' ability to support deported parents' reunification with their children.