

Here's why detainees at immigration detention centers across the U.S. are starting hunger strikes



Last Friday, detainees at California's [Adelanto Detention Facility](#) protested meager living conditions by calling a hunger strike; the fourth nationwide since October.

A [handwritten letter from one of the men](#), sent to immigration advocacy group Community Initiatives for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement (CIVIC), begins by saying "detainees are not prisoners" before expressing numerous misgivings for thousands of individuals awaiting their fate, including poor health care, unpalatable meals, and disregard for their complaints. Though many are undocumented, some are legal permanent residents with families in the United States.

At least 20 males took part in the Oct. 30 hunger strike, but an anonymous tipster told CIVIC executive director Christina Fialho an unconfirmed total of 300 may have participated.

"The poor quality of food is nearly a universal complaint from the people at Adelanto," Fialho told *Latinos Post*. "The sizes are purposefully small to encourage people to purchase more food from the commissary and some of the food is spoiled."

"On at least one occasion, the men reported maggots in the food. Perhaps even more troubling is that during religious holidays that require fasting during daylight, GEO Group and ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement) do not make adequate provision for the men to eat after sunset."

CIVIC, which released a [documentary](#) last Friday detailing abuses at Adelanto over a six-month span, recommends the facility be shut down if only for a confirmed death and miscarriage at the detention center.

The report cites racism against Muslims, who were put in segregation for praying, and the unwarranted treatment of detainee Gerardo Corrales; a paralyzed man who suffered a life-threatening infection after officials refused to give him sterile catheter bags.

"The sheer number and consistency of human rights complaints at this GEO Group-owned facility over the last six months point to a mounting crisis that warrants immediate action," Fialho said, adding that "ICE must act immediately by terminating its contract with the City of Adelanto and closing the doors of the facility for good."

Days earlier, at least [27 women at a Texas detention center](#) - predominately from Central American and Mexican backgrounds - began their own protest, penning letters of verbal abuse, poor food quality, and what one woman said were "gestures to make us feel worthless."

ICE spokesman Adelina Pruneda disputed reports of the hunger strike in an email to [Fusion](#), saying administrators weren't aware of detainees refusing to eat.

Like Adelanto, the T. Don Hutto Detention Center is a corporate-run facility with a controversial history. The American Civil Liberties Union sued the Taylor, Texas facility in 2009 citing unsuitable living condition for children. The landmark settlement led to the release of 26 children and the switch to a women-only center.

Unified efforts in El Paso, Texas and Louisiana last month were the first to garner nation attention. On Oct. 14, 54 South Asian detainees at an El Paso, Texas center held a week-long hunger strike, and 14 protesters at the LaSalle Detention Center in Louisiana followed; both made up of immigrants from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

According to DRUM -a South Asian immigrant rights organization - ICE deliberately held on to their paperwork and said to drink water in place of medicine. They told [NBC News](#) that dozens of officers assaulted one of the strike's lead organizers, Haji Khiay Mohamed Bilal, and placed him in solitary confinement.

"ICE takes very seriously the health, safety, and welfare of those in our care and we continue to monitor the situation," the government organization said in a statement last month. ICE's El Paso Processing Center is staffed with medical and mental health care providers who monitor, diagnose and treat residents at the facility. ICE also uses outside, private medical/mental health care service providers as needed. Individuals have access to meals served three times daily at the cafeteria, snacks provided by the facility, or food purchased from the EPC commissary."

While Fialho believes the Obama Administration's failed immigrant incarceration system connects all four protests, a brunt of the blame lands on the detention facilities for failing to meet detainees' minimum standards of living.

"CIVIC stands behind the men on hunger strike at Adelanto and the 95 other brave women and men who have gone on hunger strikes over the last two weeks in immigration detention facilities across the country," Fialho said. "We are here to support them, and we want to remind ICE that we are watching for retaliation."