

Commission urges end to US detention of immigrant families

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Washington: The US Commission on Civil Rights urged the Barack Obama administration to "immediately" end the detention of undocumented families and minors.

A report issued by this independent, bipartisan federal agency urges the administration and Congress to end the detention of minors and women with children, and to guarantee that those caught crossing the border will be treated with the most basic standards of respect, EFE reported on Friday.

The document asks the government to respect court rulings against detention and the inhumane conditions in which undocumented minors, whether accompanied by adults or not, are being held in detention centres by the Department of Homeland Security, or DHS.

The commission called on the DHS -- in charge of the immigrant detention centres managed by the office of Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) -- to "act immediately to release families from detention".

The report says that ICE combines tough treatment in applying the law with a lax attitude toward taking responsibility for the living conditions in subcontracted detention facilities.

Most undocumented families are held in detention centres operated by private subcontractors, as in the case of the Karnes Immigration Family Detention Center in Karnes, Texas, and the Family Residential Center in Dilley, Texas, with 2,400 beds.

The GEO Group and the Corrections Corporation of America manage separate facilities with annual revenues that top \$1 billion.

The commission's recommendations, sent in a letter to Obama, Vice-President Joe Biden and House Speaker John Boehner, go further and request no more financing for the detention of immigrant families and that the DHS "release all family detainees, reduce the use of detention, ensure humane treatment of detainees (and) increase the use of alternatives to detention".

The report says that children and their families live in overcrowded prisons, without privacy and contrary to the regulations and standards of the DHS itself.

The commission also slammed the position taken by some government attorneys who claim that the policy of detention for families and children aims to scare off any more undocumented migrants thinking about crossing the border.

In the summer of 2014, the US was overwhelmed by the massive arrivals of families and lone children, above all from Central America, in numbers far exceeding the capacity of existing detention centres.

Many with family members in the US were released, but others, including women with children, have remained behind bars until their deportation processes are decided upon, a process which can take months.

The Commission on Civil Rights, chaired by Democrat Martin Castro, also said that detainees should have access to due process of law, and that those seeking asylum, because their lives are in danger, be protected.

"Now, more than ever before, we need to treat fairly and humanely those persons, especially women and children, who are seeking sanctuary from violence and instability in their countries," Castro said in a communique.

Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson said recently, however, that 70 percent of families spend less than two months in detention centres.

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