

We are Cubans and are very surprised by the way we are being treated for seeking refuge in this country. It seems that the country we have arrived to is not the free country the United States is supposed to be. La Palma Correctional Center has seemed more like a maximum security prison since we arrived. We are confined in cells and counted every 1-2 hours, as though we were criminals, or as though we were trying to escape. We are only given one hour a day of fresh air, and if we complain, we are sent directly to "the hole." They treat us like animals, even beating us.

Some of us haven't been able to take it, after all that we have endured in Cuba and our other countries of origin, what we are living here is so bad that some of us have even attempted suicide. [REDACTED] cut his own veins. [REDACTED] climbed a fence in the patio to hang himself. I don't know what happened to them or how they are now. Another young man cut his veins so deeply that blood covered the floor; I don't recall his name, only that he was detained in Mohave Alpha bed 123. He had asked to be transferred to a different detention center.

Calderon Pedroso also attempted suicide but his complaints were never heard. He complained to ICE about the mistreatment he had received at La Palma, about the beatings he had received, but heard nothing. He complained to Homeland Security, but they never responded. He is still here being treated like a caged beast. [REDACTED] could no longer stand being in La Palma detention center because of all the injustice and mistreatment, so he swallowed a razor blade and a piece of chain link. [REDACTED], seeing all the things happening here, and being locked up so long without a release date, had a nervous breakdown; his treatment consisted of being completely drugged all the time. He was not given any other medical attention.

[REDACTED] hung himself while confined in his cell because he could no longer bear living in this detention center. He wanted to pursue his asylum claim from a different center where he would be treated with respect. I don't know what happened to him. [REDACTED] had a nervous breakdown here in La Palma and tried to kill himself; the last I heard of him, he had been in "the hole" for four months, but I know nothing more.

Wilber Baldez Ramos attempted suicide because he could not take it anymore; he regretted having asked to be deported back to Cuba, but ICE would not reconsider. Hassan Fernandez is alive only by chance; he could not endure any more and tied a noose around his own neck. Instead of helping him, the guards sprayed him with a hose. There are others whose names I don't know, and in truth, I can't speak of the suicides anymore, it is too sad.

All these people attempted suicide along with another 140 people who went on a hunger strike or protested against the treatment in La Palma. We are not trying to end our detention, we just want to have our asylum cases handled in a different detention center. There were 500 Cubans but now there are about 300 Cubans in La Palma. This is not a detention center like Florence, Reynosa, Matamoros, El Paso, Tijuana, Louisiana or other centers in the United States. This

place has been like Hell due to the treatment of the detainees by the guards. ICE doesn't listen to our demands or our complaints about the acts of racism, and never visits the center. The humiliation and mistreatment here are making it impossible for us to apply for asylum in this country.

The majority of us in detention at La Palma are Cubans and most of us are seeking asylum. When we arrived here there were already some Cubans who had been detained 10 months or more without a final court date; now all the Cubans will have been here a year or longer and still don't know when our final court date will be. We are people fleeing a dictatorship imposed by Fidel Castro, now run by his brother Raul, so we would not be mistreated, beaten, or disappeared for our beliefs. This is very similar to what is now happening to us in La Palma, I say similar because of course you can't compare Cuba to La Palma. But I know that for having sent this letter, for having told you what is happening here inside La Palma, that we are going to be sent to "the hole" (solitary confinement).

I will start by telling you that the craziness just got even worse with the start of COVID-19; in addition to worsening the intensity of racism and mistreatment, there have been countless cases of infections. For the past 8 days I have seen that Zuni-Alpha, Zuni-Bravo, and Zuni-Charlie "tanks" are full, with each cell holding two by two detainees. One cannot blame the detainees for becoming sick; it is impossible to social-distance since there are 120 detainees in each "tank" without any protection whatsoever. I blame the CO's (guards) because when coronavirus started in Arizona, or when it started here in La Palma, it was February. It spread throughout the prison due to the negligence of the personnel who were supposed to take care of us. They did not give us face masks, disinfectants, or any other type of protection. The COs didn't wear masks either, because the orders from the warden were that the protection orders didn't apply to them. They were not obliged to use face masks.

Also, they do not clean with chemicals or soap; cleaning was done using only water twice daily, and if the detainees didn't clean everything themselves it did not get done because the staff would not do it. The same thing happened in the kitchen, even with the dishes and the dining area, and this was the main area in La Palma where people were getting infected. The majority of the kitchen workers became infected with COVID. The rest of the detainees became afraid of getting sick and refused to work in the kitchen. They were sent to "the hole" because they refused.

ICE and the guards did not care about the conditions, they told us that if we did not work, we would not eat. Because of this we went two months eating only little boxes of bologna which barely filled us. If a detainee was ordered to work and refused, he was punished for disobeying orders and sent to "the hole" for 30-60 days. Anyone who is punished for any reason or cause is treated this way, for reporting injustices that are committed here. And now the people who are infected with COVID-19 are being isolated in "the hole" alongside uninfected people who are being punished, running the risk of infecting them all.

People with COVID-19 are treated with water and Tylenol. They don't test people for COVID-19 even if you have symptoms, they only take your temperature. There is no other type of medicine, only isolation. The medics and guards say it is not their fault if we catch the virus; they say we are strong and healthy and we can tolerate the virus.

In March, one month after COVID came to the center, and after half the detainees had become infected, we finally got masks, and the COs began wearing them. Before that, the detainees had been protesting so they would give us masks, and many detainees had been punished with "the hole" for making and using homemade masks. They said we were scaring people and that homemade masks were prohibited. Despite the threats and the punishments we are still here in La Palma without a final court date and expecting to lose our asylum cases. Here, with Judge John Davis, who gets the majority of the Cubans' cases at La Palma, you can't win your case.

Right now the COs use face masks but they don't all want to. They use the masks not to protect us, but to protect themselves since we are in a danger zone. COVID-19 continues because they continue to bring in more detainees from the outside, who have been living in the US. They mix them in with the rest of us as though nothing would go wrong. Most recently this happened a week ago, they did not do a COVID test on the new detainee, nor on any of us. They are transferring people here from Eloy Detention Center without testing them for COVID, and it doesn't worry them even though it is one of the detention centers most contaminated with COVID in all of Arizona. The only thing that ICE cares about is the money they can extract from the government. But how are they going to get that money if the prison is empty? Since migrants are not entering from the border, they look for transfers from any other detention center, or they bring people in from the street. Even if those people are not going to apply for asylum they hold up their deportation for 3-4 months; that way the prison doesn't run out of detainees and they can charge the government every day for each person they have detained in here.

We can't be completely sure whether any detainees have died. I knew about a Guatemalan man who was very ill and they immediately deported him, I never found out anything more about him. From what I have seen here, I believe that if someone died inside here, they are capable of throwing his body into the desert and making it look like it was somebody who died while crossing the border illegally.

We just want to say to you that the only people who can help us, the only people we can trust are the journalists. The news channels don't answer our calls anymore, there is no more coverage of La Palma. We ask that you speak with Otaola, Jorge Ramos, Ultra, Carlucho, Elecier Avila, and all the Cubans in exile in Hialeah Versalles who helped Yunier the Stowaway, who came over in the cargo hold of an airplane. We are not going to disappoint them, because we are not afraid to say "Down with Diaz Canel" (a slogan of the Cuban opposition). I can assure you that all of us Cubans in La Palma are not lying, we are independent opposition members. We are in the worst detention center in all of the United States. About 140 detainees were transferred out to other centers, and the majority of them are now out, with their families,

continuing their asylum cases, or even having won their cases. But here that is not the case, ICE told us we have to be here two years to resolve a case, and that if we lose we can stay with family during our appeal. It is impossible to believe, but it is true.

We are asking to be transferred to another detention center, or that we be allowed to present our asylum cases together with our families or representatives. We are not going to be a burden on the government. We have been detained for so long, although we have not committed any crimes. We only seek liberty, we have truly been persecuted politically and we are not deceiving anyone. We are here in the United States because we are seeking help. Thank you for hearing us.

We are authorizing the publication of all this information by all news outlets in the US, along with the photograph we have sent. God forbid that this does not work. We are seeking liberty here because this is the only country that offers us any help, there is no other. For this reason all Cuban exiles owe an eternal debt to the US. We only ask for help, and we hope that this document arrives in the hands of Jorge Ramos and Otaola. Thank you.

Signed,

Frank Lopez Perez A213351173  
Jimmy Franquiz Gonzalvez A213352125  
Yovany Jimenez Dominguez A213351388  
Livan Puebla Monteagudo A213352635  
Magdiel Exposito Rodriguez A213352027  
Hassan Fernandez Rodriguez A213352306  
Jorge Luis Guaman A201907365  
Liubomil Jacomino Ferrer A203692179  
Yuniel Machin Rojas A201565491  
Wilber Valdes Ramos A213352241  
Felix Andre Calderon-Pedroso A203711825