



Jasper Art

BROKEN HOPE

DEPORTATION AND THE ROAD HOME

ISSUE BRIEF

Lynn Tramonte and Suma Setty | Winter 2023

What if you were told to pack your possessions and leave your family, friends, career, home, and life behind, perhaps forever? How would you even begin? Could you say good-bye to everyone and everything you love, not knowing when or if you will see them again?

That is what deportation is. But deportation is discussed so casually in public discourse about immigration policy that the word has lost some of its severity.

Permanent banishment from one's home, family, friends, and job – from a life built over years or even decades – is an extreme action that causes lasting harm to everyone it touches.

This Issue Brief summarizes a longer report, “**Broken Hope: Deportation and the Road Home**,” a collaboration between the Ohio Immigrant Alliance (OHIA) and the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP). “Broken Hope” highlights the experiences, hopes, and dreams of 255 people who were either deported from the United States or forced to leave before being deported. They are part of OHIA’s #ReuniteUS campaign, which seeks to change policy so that these mothers, fathers, uncles, and friends can come home, and broken hopes are healed.

Most people involved in #ReuniteUS feel that their contributions to this country, and the holes left by their absences, have been ignored. “Broken Hope” connects their voices and experiences with outside research; analyzes the legal and political context; and calls on federal policymakers, the media, the immigration movement, and philanthropists to engage in this effort and welcome them home.

***CONTENT WARNING:** Broken Hope discusses topics such as deportation, family separation, self-harm and suicide, murder, death, and trauma experienced by adults and children.*

THIS REPORT EXISTS BECAUSE THEY EXIST

During the Trump administration, many long-term U.S. residents, including those with work permits who paid taxes, were abruptly and cruelly deported. Maryam Sy of OHIA spent hundreds of hours interviewing over 250 people who were suddenly removed from their lives in the United States. A Muslim woman of African descent herself, Sy and her small team were able to speak with people in their preferred languages.



A lot of these people went through, I think, the hardest part of their life when they were deported. Because, it was like a broken hope, like the government broke their hope. They came to America to seek asylum for a better life. And they were happy working and living in America. So when they were sent back in some very horrible conditions ... we were the first people calling them and saying, ‘We are so sorry about what happened to you.’” — Maryam Sy, Organizer, Ohio Immigrant Alliance

OHIA and CLASP intend for “Broken Hope” to be the phoenix rising from these ashes. Before publishing the report, Sy, Lynn Tramonte of OHIA, and Suma Setty of CLASP presented the report to members of the #ReuniteUS WhatsApp group with video recordings in English, French, Fulani, and Wolof. The response was overwhelmingly positive.

“I am supporting you guys and ... I’m very, very happy to hear the information you brought to us. And we know that we have to be patient. We know that, and I advise everybody in the group to be patient, and I believe that you guys are working well and I know it’s not that easy...[T]he most important thing is that you guys are working to help us. And we appreciate it a lot. May Allah reward you,” said one #ReuniteUS community member.

“I AGREE WITH WHATEVER YOU GUYS DECIDE TO DO TO HELP US COME HOME TO AMERICA. I WOULD RATHER COME BACK TO AMERICA AND BE LOCKED UP THAN LIVING HERE.

- #REUNITEUS COMMUNITY MEMBER

”

THE INTERVIEWEES

The vast majority of the 255 people Sy and her team interviewed are Black Muslim men originally from African nations that had resided in the U.S. for over a decade, with a median residency of 17 years. One hundred and ten people mentioned still having relatives in the U.S, and 73 are parents of a child in the U.S. Nine are married to U.S. citizens.

Eighty-seven individuals specifically mentioned paying taxes. Many are now eligible for Social Security retirement benefits, but have been unable to access this money after their deportation. Some owned businesses and homes, and some of these homes are now facing foreclosure. Others were community leaders, like [Seydou Sarr](#), a religious teacher in Columbus, Ohio.

The people involved in #ReuniteUS were born in 27 countries and lived in 20 U.S. states. They speak at least 22 languages; two hundred and eleven know two or more languages, and 83 know at least four.

A majority were deported or left during the Trump administration. At least 126 people were formally deported. One hundred and twenty-four were ordered deported by a U.S. immigration judge and made the difficult decision to leave before they could be detained and deported. They did not want to be detained in immigration jail, and wanted to have control over where they were sent.

Twenty-one people were deported to countries with a Department of State Travel Advisory of “Level 4: Do Not Travel,” and 45 to countries with a “Level 3: Reconsider Travel” advisory.

Seven people have returned to the U.S. legally since the Biden administration took office, and at least one of those returnees now has a green card. One person received asylum in France and at least two obtained legal status in Canada. Four people died after being deported, far from the comfort of home and family. The rest are still fighting to reunite with their families while also trying to stay safe in their countries of origin or find a new home.

NOT FORGOTTEN

Black immigrants face a multitude of barriers to thriving in the U.S., including anti-Black systemic racism and an immigration system ingrained in xenophobic ideology. From the African and Muslim ban and deportations of long-term U.S. residents to the repression of Black migration today, Black immigrants' basic humanity is constantly denied.¹ This Issue Brief and report hope to refocus on their stories, in their words.

RESEARCH REFLECTS REAL LIFE

The stories of these 255 people illustrate how immigration detention and deportation unravel people's lives. The current body of research on deportation has shown the same.

Economic Insecurity. Deportation often removes a breadwinner from a family and creates new financial stresses.² For those who are detained before being deported, the financial distress starts earlier. Their loved ones must pay to visit them, hire lawyers, and ensure they have money for phone calls and basic necessities. Many families experience housing and food insecurity after the deportation of a main breadwinner.

Read about the Ndiaye family.

"We had the American dream come true and this immigration system broke everything. We had a house, a beautiful house, and now we have nothing. It's very hard for my wife and kids to survive," said a #ReuniteUS community member.

Psychological Harms to the Individual. Financial strain; family separation; dehumanizing and inhumane treatment by U.S. immigration officials; and post-deportation experiences, such as arrest in their native country, housing insecurity, and a lack of opportunities to earn income all deeply damage people's mental health and sense of safety.

Psychological Harms to Children. Children whose parents were detained or deported have more PTSD symptoms and behavioral problems than other children of immigrants.³ Witnessing the immigration-related arrest of a family member is especially damaging, and is associated with higher rates of depressive symptoms among adolescents.⁴

For Emma's family, this fact is crushing.

Health Problems in Adults. Detention and deportation take a physical toll on individuals in myriad ways, including medical neglect and physical abuse in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody, as well as a lack of access to health care after deportation.

Read what happened to Jimmy Aldoud.

People in #ReuniteUS also experienced persecution and even torture in the countries to which they were deported. This added to their distress after experiencing mistreatment in ICE jails and during their deportation journeys.

Read about the WRAP torture device.

Health Problems in Children. Separation from a parent is an Adverse Childhood Event, or a traumatic childhood experience that correlates with a greater likelihood of developing chronic health conditions and substance use disorders.⁵ The loss of a father is associated with shorter telomeres (a critical part of DNA) in children, which leads to long-term health conditions like mental illness, stress, and obesity.⁶

Disruption in Education. When a loved one is deported, children may have a harder time focusing on school.⁷ This leads to difficulty attending class, doing homework, taking tests, and participating in extracurricular and social activities. Older children may have to work to support themselves and their families financially, and can fall behind in school or drop out to work full time.⁸

Read what one Ohio teenager had to say.

Single Parents Overnight. Partners, mostly mothers in #ReuniteUS, become single parents without warning. Many work one or more jobs to pay bills, and struggle to find affordable, safe childcare. Efforts to reunite with their loved ones add exorbitant costs, such as legal representation and immigration application fees.

Ibrahima Keita could not take his wife and children with him to Mali, where it would be very difficult to treat his son's sickle cell anemia. His wife Neissa is trying to manage alone.

Hear from Fatima Sow.

The Absence of a Caregiver. Children's financial and emotional well-being are also influenced by the involvement, or absence, of a father or father-like figure.⁹

"I HAVE A DAUGHTER, AND I MISS HER. SHE NEEDS ME IN [HER] LIFE. I JUST WANT TO HAVE A LIFE, I CAN'T SURVIVE IN AFRICA. IN AMERICA I HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO SEE MY DAUGHTER GROW. I WANT MY DAUGHTER TO GROW UP WITH ME. I WANT HER TO KNOW WHO I AM.

- #REUNITEUS COMMUNITY MEMBER

”

Fractured Relationships. Many deported people are forced to leave their children and spouses behind, rather than bring them to an unfamiliar country or a place where access to jobs, food, health care, education, and even basic safety is limited. "There's a lot of gangs where I live. I fear for my daughter and my wife [if they have to go to Guyana]. Many of the gangs come from the police. I'm afraid that my wife and daughter will be raped because this is something very frequent in here," said one man.

Read the unlikely love story of Demba Jobe and Georgina White.

Weakened Society. Deportation fractures relationships in ways that may not be repairable or replaceable, whether the family in question consists of a mother and/or father or is helmed by step-parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, chosen family, or siblings. Forced separation weakens families' ability to take care of each other, and weakens a society like ours that gains strength through family.

Read about this Cincinnati family.

“I HAVE KEPT MY COURAGE FOR MY FAMILY. NOW I AM DESPERATE BECAUSE MY LIFE IS SAD, ESPECIALLY WHEN I SEE MY DAUGHTER BY VIDEO CALL. I HAVE NEVER HUGGED HER, AND IT HURTS.

- #REUNITEUS COMMUNITY MEMBER



THE ROAD HOME: RECOMMENDATIONS

The people involved in #ReuniteUS say they feel left out of the immigration policy debate. The authors hope “Broken Hope” is a way for the world to meet them, and join the movement to welcome them home.

The truth is, forcing them to remain apart from their communities and families is a political choice, not a requirement. Allowing people to come back together would be a supreme act of love, beautiful and profound.

There are ways that the Executive Branch, Congress, the media, and others can begin to remedy past harms, change policy to allow more deported people to return, and prevent more individuals from being ripped from their communities. Policymakers often say that the power to do good is what drove them to seek office. #ReuniteUS is that chance.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

The report’s recommendations were culled from a variety of sources, including the **National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild (NIPNLG)**, OHIA, **National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC)**, **Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI)**, Cameroon Advocacy Network, and Mauritanian Network for Human Rights in US, as well as #ReuniteUS community members, lawyers, and formerly detained immigrants.¹⁰

Actions that the Biden administration can take include:

- Create a centralized office within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to review requests to return.
- Release immigrants in civil detention facilities.
- Stop requesting funding for immigration detention.
- End immigration jail contracts and close all immigration jails.
- Prohibit inhumane deportation practices, such as use of the WRAP.
- DHS attorneys should support motions to reopen or reconsider asylum relief cases, removal proceedings, and immigrants’ requests to return with legal status, to the greatest extent possible.
- Revise ICE’s 2012 directive, “Facilitating Return for Certain Lawfully Removed Aliens,” to make return more accessible.
- Revise ICE’s 2022 directive, “Interests of Noncitizen Parents and Legal Guardians of Minor Children or Incapacitated Adults,” to expand the return path for deported parents.
- Take an expansive, equitable view to adjudicating waivers and alternatives to inadmissibility and

applications for humanitarian parole.

- Improve assessments of the “exceptional and extremely unusual hardship” criteria to include the best interests of children in requests for cancellation of removal.
- Allow people to apply for cancellation of removal affirmatively, instead of only while in removal proceedings.
- Review the safety conditions of destination countries before deporting parents of U.S. citizen children and when adjudicating waivers of inadmissibility.
- Work with the Social Security Administration, DHS, and the Department of State to ensure that people who were deported and entitled to Social Security retirement benefits can receive them.
- Improve data collection to identify disparities in immigration actions and outcomes based on race and religion.
- Review all immigration policies and structures, including the operations of the immigration courts, from an anti-racist perspective.

The report also makes a series of recommendations specifically regarding Mauritians, who make up more than half of the people involved in #ReuniteUS. These include ending deportation flights to Mauritania; releasing detained Mauritians who are seeking asylum; designating Temporary Protected Status for Mauritania and other nations; and allowing people deported to danger to return.

CONGRESS

Congresspeople can support their constituents by advocating for the above administrative actions, abolishing immigration detention, and enacting the following bills:

- The New Way Forward Act (H.R. 536) prioritizes return after deportation and reduces the threat of deportation for people currently in the United States.
- The Veteran Service Recognition Act provides return pathways for U.S. military veterans who were deported, among other provisions that help veterans, Armed Service members, and close family members affected by deportation.
- The Fairness to Freedom Act establishes a right to legal representation for all immigrants facing deportation, among other provisions.
- The Reuniting Families Act strengthens and reforms the family-based immigration system; reduces enormous family-based visa backlogs; and eliminates the 3-year, 10-year, and permanent bars to reentry, among other changes.
- The Dignity for Detained Immigrants Act repeals mandatory immigration detention laws, prohibits the use of private detention facilities, and promotes community-based alternatives to incarceration.
- Additional bills that would assist others who were deported, include the Southeast Asian Deportation Relief Act and the Adoptee Citizenship Act.

MEDIA

- Journalists should dig deep and report immigration stories beyond the border.
- Outlets must allow immigrants to talk about sensitive experiences anonymously.
- Drop the I-Word (“illegal” with reference to immigrants). Instead, media outlets should employ approaches that focus on the humanity of migrants, including using people-first language and images that represent the breadth of their experiences.

IMMIGRATION ADVOCATES, RESEARCHERS, AND FUNDERS

- Broaden the concept of “family separation” to include separation due to interior deportation, as well as that which occurs at the border.
- Include people who were deported in advocacy goals and campaigns.
- Close the gap in research about deportation’s impact on Black immigrants and their families. While some organizations are actively filling that gap, others must step up.
- Resource legal services to prevent the next wave of separations and help deported people return, in addition to funding deportation defense programs, the current priority.
- Compensate deported people and their families for their time and advocacy when they engage in campaigns.



The Robles family in Columbus, Ohio. (Provided by family)

READ THE FULL REPORT

“**Broken Hope: Deportation and the Road Home**” contains rich detail about the agency, strength, resiliency, and hopes of people who have faced detention and deportation. The full report connects their experiences with external research; provides legal and political context; and offers recommendations to federal policymakers, the media, the immigration movement, and philanthropy. Read the executive summary and download the full report at <https://www.reunite.us/read>.

“It’s not easy to be in a country for almost twenty years and build your life and one day, it stops. It’s a long way to get experience in another country. To learn English. To go to school at nighttime. To learn. Go to work. And then one day they say stop. You don’t have it any more, you have to leave. The day [ICE] told me that — it was the end of the world for me,” said Goura Ndiaye.

The new hope is that by learning about these experiences, the Biden administration, Congress, and all stakeholders in the immigration movement will prioritize paths for return and preserve families and communities in the future.



Audio summaries of this report are available online in:

- English
- Francais
- Fulani



Issa Sao returns to his family in Cincinnati, Ohio. (Provided by family)

STORIES

SEYDOU SARR

After Columbus Quran teacher Seydou Sarr was deported, Ahmed Tidiane, president of the local mosque, wrote:

“By this present letter, the masjid calls upon the United States Department of Homeland Security to assist Mr. Seydou Sarr to return to the United States. Mr. Sarr was deported to Mauritania in 2018. Upon his arrival, he was detained and mistreated. His family members had to pay a heavy fine (called *pour boire*) which is some sort of bribery to obtain his release. He stayed in Mauritania without being able to obtain his civil documents back, which compelled him to stay confined at home without freedom [of] movement in Mauritania. Because of the unbearable conditions, he decided to go to Senegal to live there. According to him, living undocumented in Senegal is safer than living in a stateless condition in his own country.

Mr. Seydou Sarr has been an Imam Naib (substitute) since the inception of the mosque until the day of his deportation. He was a very active member of the mosque. During his tenure in the community, he was a role model to other people and displayed strong family values and discipline. Although he has a strict belief in being a good citizen, he is very cheerful and close to his peers. He volunteered his time every Saturday and Sunday to teach the community children holy Qur'an, inspire them with good morals and keep them away from the street and unproductive activities during their idle times.

All the children loved him. He taught them good morals. I recall one day, I went to my daughter's teacher-parent conference. At that time, my daughter was attending 4th grade. Her teacher said she was the only one who would volunteer to sweep the floor of the classroom. As a proud father I looked at my daughter to tell her how wonderful she was, and even before I started my sentence, she said, 'My Quran teacher taught me to volunteer.'”

One of Seydou's former pupils wrote:

“Ever since Seydou Sarr left the community, I've noticed a decline in kids wanting to go to school; an increase in kids taking drugs; an increase in kids doing violent acts; an increase in kids of the community having no place to express their feelings and anger, which results in them being depressed.

I strongly believe that if Seydou Sarr was still in the community, all those things that I listed would most likely have been prevented. And I also believe he should be given another opportunity to come back, not just to better his life but to better the lives of the future kids in our communities.”

Another former student, who is now a member of the National Guard, also made a **plea of mercy** for his mentor and friend.

NDIAYE FAMILY



Goura Ndiaye working as an electrician, before his deportation. (Provided by individual)

In 2018 Goura Ndiaye, a 60-year-old electrician from Columbus, Ohio, was scheduled for a hip replacement surgery a few days after his “check in” with ICE. Prior to the Trump administration, these meetings had been routine and uneventful. Goura’s medical insurance had approved the surgery, and he had completed all of the pre-op preparation. Instead of allowing Goura to get the operation and then report back, as he asked, ICE arrested him. While in a series of unhygienic jails, he received no medical treatment beyond aspirin.¹¹

One day the following year, ICE agents came into Goura’s cell and said they were taking him to a medical appointment. Instead, they took him to the airport for deportation. By that time, Goura’s hip had **completely detached from his body**.

In Ohio, Goura owned his own business and was the beloved father of three U.S. citizen children, including a young boy with Down Syndrome. Now, his family is experiencing food and housing insecurity, and he remains powerless to help them. The weight of supporting and caring for the family has fallen heavily on his stepdaughter and daughter, who work part-time in addition to attending school.

An intelligent and thoughtful man, Goura is one of ten people currently involved in the National Immigrant Justice Center’s campaign, **Chance to Come Home**. He said, “I think deportation like this is a mistake. . . . They should give people second chances. That’s what I believe. . . . And I do love America. Whatever happened to me, I’m not gonna say any wrong things to any American people. No. I had a lot of friends. A lot of good neighbors. Never had problems with anybody. I couldn’t believe they were going to deport me.”¹²

He continued, **“It’s not easy to be in a country for almost twenty years and build your life and one day, it stops. It’s a long way to get experience in another country. To learn English. To go to school at nighttime. To learn. Go to work. Get the experience. And then one day they say stop. You don’t have it any more, you have to leave. The day [ICE] told me that — it was the end of the world for me.”**

In homes like the Ndiayes’, women became single mothers and sole providers overnight. The Ndiaye family and others had worked themselves into the middle class, but deportation forced them into poverty and homelessness, toxic stress, depression, and self-harm.

EMMA

Psychological problems due to detention and deportation can cause irreversible physical harm. Columnist Connie Schultz **wrote about Emma**, an Ohio pre-teen whose father was deported:

"I really wanted you to see the picture of [Emma, the pseudonym of the 11-year-old girl] sitting in her bedroom full of bright colors, Barbies and books. I wanted you to see the tiny flower painted on her cheek for Easter Sunday, too, and the gentle smile on her pretty face."

Emma died by suicide following her father's swift deportation after a traffic stop. The reason he was targeted by police? Using his high beams while driving. The reason the police called immigration authorities? He "looked" or "sounded" like an immigrant. Shultz continued:

"For six months, Emma's grave was marked by a makeshift altar until her mother could pay off the headstone. Now, Mary [pseudonym for Emma's mother] lives in constant fear that she and her oldest daughter will get deported. If that happens, she said, she might leave behind her three American children.

'Maybe they could be in foster care,' she said. 'Maybe they could still grow up in America.'"

This should never have happened. Emma's father should be with his family, in their living room in Ohio. Her mother and siblings should be happy. Their family should be whole.

Emma should be alive.



JIMMY ALDOUD

Jimmy Aldoud, a single man from Detroit who suffered from mental illness and diabetes, had a loving extended family. In 2019, Jimmy was **deported to Iraq**. He had never set foot in that country, did not speak the language, and was terrified. Though Jimmy was born in Greece, Greece does not have birthright citizenship. So his nationality was linked to Iraq, his parents' country of origin.

Jimmy struggled to communicate and obtain insulin to manage his disease in Iraq. He died sixty-three days after his deportation—"alone and scared," according to his sister, Mary Bolis. His was another Trump-era deportation that did not have to happen.



OHIO TEENAGER

In Ohio in 2018, a teenager working at Corso's Flower and Garden Center was handcuffed and thrown into a van alongside his parents during an immigration raid, despite being a U.S. citizen. He said: **"I'll be 18 soon... If my parents get deported, I'd fight to have my brother and sister stay. I'd have to drop out of school to get a good job—labor job—or be able to pay rent, food, everything. I'd become the new parent for the family."**

He was sixteen years old.



FATIMA SOW

Fatima Sow of Columbus, Ohio is bearing too much alone after her husband's deportation. The couple's youngest child has severe medical issues that require extensive therapy, hospital stays, and lengthy medical appointments. At two years old, he still could not walk or talk.

Five years after her husband's deportation, Fatima is still trying to do it all on a part-time income. "My kids always ask about their father," she **wrote** in a message to the Biden administration's Interagency Task Force on the Reunification of Families. **"It's hard and painful to witness. They always see their friends with their fathers and always ask me why can't they have their daddy with them. It's hurtful to see."**

Fatima's message was part of a goal to redefine "family reunification" in the purview of this task force. In 2021, the task force said it was taking these comments under consideration and preparing a report for President Biden. As of this writing, the report has not been made public.



DEMBA JOBE

Demba Jobe, from The Gambia, didn't plan to fall in love with his colleague, Georgina White. He traveled to the U.S. on a G-2 visa several times in the early 2010s for training at the World Bank. Georgina led the sessions. Their friendship developed and eventually became romantic. They married, and Demba was a loving partner to Georgina and stepfather to her children.

Then Demba had to go to The Gambia after his brother died. Prior to this trip, he had applied for and received "advance parole" (permission to return after being abroad), which his lawyer assured him was all he needed to return. But the immigration officers at Chicago O'Hare International Airport would not let Demba re-enter the United States.

When Demba refused to sign a paper allowing them to deport him immediately, he was taken to an ICE jail. He spent nine months locked up and was ultimately deported. During his court proceedings, Demba requested and was denied an interpreter. He tried to understand what was happening in court over the jailhouse video feed, but the challenge proved insurmountable. He was in a jail conference room and his lawyer and the judge were miles away.



Demba Jobe. (Provided by individual)

In immigration court, Demba's marriage to a U.S. citizen did not matter. Her testimony about their love and the help they gave each other did not matter. The system did what it was designed to do: remove him from everything he loved. Demba recently spoke to the Ohio Immigrant Alliance about this experience.

"I'm still [in] love [with] my wife. Love my family, you know, and I wish to come back and stay with them, you know, and continue [the] life I was doing with her because she need[s] me. I need her. But the way things are working over there [in the U.S.], I think it's not gonna [be] possible for me to return back to the country, you know, because they lie [about] everything against me, you know? And I don't have no word[s] to say, I don't have nothing to say because they don't give me the chance, because everything was based on racism."

Demba and Georgina stay connected and hope to be reunited. While Demba has been gone, Georgina endured three back surgeries and still struggles with physical activity. She downsized her apartment and changed jobs to reduce the strain on her body. But across the ocean, there's a man ready, willing, and able to help—and praying for a chance to return to her one day.

Recently, the distance has become unbearable and Demba fears their relationship may not last.

THE WRAP

In 2021, African Communities Together, Black Alliance for Just Immigration, Cameroon Advocacy Network, Haitian Bridge Alliance, UndocuBlack Network, Texas A&M University School of Law Immigrant Rights Clinic, and Witness at the Border **filed a complaint** with the Department of Homeland Security Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties regarding ICE’s misuse of a full-body restraint, known as the WRAP, on deportation flights to Africa.

“It was like being rolled into a bag,” said Castillo*, who was subjected to the WRAP after resisting deportation. He continued:

“They tied my feet together, then they tightened the WRAP around my legs with three straps. They put something over my neck and around my torso and arms. They cuffed my hands in front of me and attached them to a chain around my waist. They snapped a rope or strap or cord from my neck to my feet. Then they leaned on my back and pushed my face toward my knees, and pulled the strap tight. My body was at a 40-degree angle. I was left completely immobile. I was forced into the WRAP while we were still at Prairieland Detention Center. I was left in the WRAP from around 10:30 a.m. on November 11, 2020, until we were somewhere over the Atlantic ocean that night....

They eventually took the WRAP off, but I remained shackled all the way to Douala [Cameroon]—around sixteen hours. I couldn’t talk. I couldn’t eat. All I remember is the pain and the yelling of the officers. I was detained in the U.S. for two years and four months.

When I arrived in [Cameroon], I was arrested at the airport and taken to police detention for further investigation. I was detained for 12 days. There were open sores [on] my wrists where the ICE cuffs had cut into my skin. In detention I had no water or soap to keep them clean. They got infected. I was in a cell with many men. There was no toilet. My family finally managed to get me out and now I am in hiding in a third country. I cannot remember what [it is] like to feel safe.”

According to the civil rights complaint, the WRAP is sold as a “humane restraint” to protect people threatening to self-harm or who need urgent medical attention. For ICE, it is simply a way to get an immigrant onto a deportation plane.

“There was so much pain in my waist and in my back. My lungs were compressed, I couldn’t breathe. I couldn’t sit up. I was immobilized,” said Godswill*, another victim of the WRAP who participated in the civil rights complaint.

My body was in so much stress. I shouted, ‘You’re killing me!’ I truly felt I was meeting my death in that moment. Six officers, three on each side, picked me up and carried me onto the plane. They plopped me down, like a load of wood, across a center row of seats.”

People Maryam Sy spoke with echoed these experiences. Some had been subjected to the WRAP themselves; others had seen it used on fellow passengers.

None will ever forget it.

**Alias used for privacy*

KEITA FAMILY



The Keita family in Cincinnati, before Ibrahim was deported. (Provided by family)

In Cincinnati, Abdul and Solomon, ages five and seven, and their mom, Neissa, collapsed into tears as ICE agents arrested Ibrahim Keita on the family's front lawn, minutes before he was to **take his boys to school**.

Ibrahim had a driver's license and a work permit. The government knew where he lived and that he was in the country. After thirty years in the United States, ICE agents under the Trump administration took Ibrahim away from his family not because it had to, but because it could.

That began a nightmare that continues to this day. Ibrahim, a quiet, middle-aged man with a soft smile, spent months in immigration jail and worked with lawyers to try to find a way to stay, before being deported to Mali. Like so many others in #ReuniteUS, his wife Neissa became a single mom overnight, caring for her children's emotional and physical needs while also dealing with her own fears and stresses. The family has loomed on the edges of homelessness several times. Kind neighbors and community members went above and beyond to help them survive. But no one can take the place of Ibrahim—not only the family's sole breadwinner, but their emotional rock.

Living together in Mali is not an option; in fact, it would mean certain death for one of the boys, who has sickle cell anemia and could not receive treatment there. Moreover, the U.S. government has issued a **Level 4 - Do Not Travel Advisory** for Mali due to increased violence, kidnappings, and terrorism. The "choice" to reunite the family in Mali is really no choice at all.

Although it is difficult for a reserved person like Ibrahim, he has begun to speak out publicly in hopes that someone in power will help. His pain is palpable in a **video** for the National Immigrant Justice Center: **"I cry a lot. I think about my two kids. Sometimes I can't even talk about it because it makes me sad. I worked hard for everything I got. Very hard.... I lost everything.... I'm a family man. I take care of my wife, my two boys. I work every day: Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year, seven days [a week]. I just want to take care of my two kids."**

The Keita family and others can reunite, if the Executive Branch shows leadership. Families are stronger together than apart. And most people in the U.S. would agree that people like Ibrahim should be welcomed home.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ “Anti-Black discrimination against non-citizens and ongoing violations of international protections for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers of African descent,” Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI), Haitian Bridge Alliance (HBA), Human Rights First (HRF), The Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES), Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights (RFK Human Rights), July 28, 2022, <https://rfkhumanrights.org/shadow-report-to-the-committee-on-the-elimination-of-racial-discrimination-cerd>.
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- ⁸ Beth Baker and Alejandra Marchevsky, “Gendering deportation, policy violence, and Latino/a family precarity,” *Latino Studies* 17 (2019): 207–24, doi: 10.1057/s41276-019-00176-0.
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