



**NEW JERSEY CIVIL RIGHTS DEFENSE
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Announcement of the NJCRDC in Response to Detainee Petition Regarding Middlesex County Death in Detention

The New Jersey Civil Rights Defense Committee (NJCRDC) expresses its full solidarity with the outrage expressed by more than ninety detainees being held at the Middlesex County Correction Center who have signed a petition in protest of the recent death (March 2) of fellow-detainee Arturo Alvarez owing to medical neglect. The signers are all immigrants who are detained pending review of their deportation status.

The NJCRDC calls for an immediate investigation into this unnecessary death and an end to the Middlesex County contract with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). We also commend the courage of these men in bringing to light the conditions in the Middlesex detention center. Besides condemning Alvarez's death, the petition, which is addressed to Michael Mukasey, Attorney General of the US, and Michael Chertoff, Director of Homeland Security, spotlights the case of Cemar Koc, another detainee whose life is now threatened by similar medical neglect. With appeals to the guarantees of the Bill of Rights and decrying the unconstitutional and inhumane conditions under which the petitioners are held, it calls for an end to immigration detention as a violation of both constitutional and human rights.

Describing conditions astonishingly similar to those detailed in our own recently published 40- page report covering five years of immigration detention in New Jersey ([*Voices of the Disappeared*](#), September 11, 2007), the often fractured language of this wrenchingly passionate petition gives authentic witness to the brutal, ongoing disregard for humanity and human life experienced by those held in detention under contracts between U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and County jails and other facilities in many parts of the country. The petition also reinforces the urgency of recent claims by the United Nations Special Human Rights Inspector, Jorge Bustamante (Promotion and Protection of All Human Rights, Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Including the Right to Development, March 5, 2008 – [English](#), [Arabic](#), [Chinese](#), [Russian](#), [Spanish](#)), that the practice of mandatory immigrant detention in the U.S. is "overused," and that it "violates the spirit of international laws and conventions and, in many cases, also violates the actual letter of those instruments" (New York Times, 3/8/2008). This report calls for an end to the mandatory detention of illegal immigrants and asks that the United States ensure an independent court review of such detentions. On an investigatory tour of

American detention facilities last year, Bustamante was refused admission to Monmouth County jail, where a Russian detainee was being force-fed after threatening suicide.

The NJCRDC sees the death of Arturo Alvarez, like the more than sixty other deaths in detention in the U.S. over the past five years that have never been fully explained or accounted for, as the inevitable outcome of a system that lacks adequate oversight and accountability. We further note that a mass detainee petition decrying similar inhumane conditions at Passaic County Jail led in early 2006 to the termination of that County's contract with ICE and the release of many detainees. County detention facilities, which represent a low-investment revenue stream for county governments, could not exist without their cooperation and collaboration.

The NJCRDC find the undiminished respect of the Middlesex petitioners for the Constitution and its guarantees an inspiration for all of us in this nation of immigrants. We deplore Governor Corzine's utter disregard of pleas that he direct the moral scrutiny of his office to this inhumane system, which affects New Jersey significantly more than many other states. In complete solidarity with the petitioners, therefore, and in admiration for the courage of their outspoken action, we join in demanding their immediate freedom, and call on the Middlesex County Freeholders to end the cooperation with ICE that makes this reprehensible and unconstitutional detention system possible.

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