

[February 11, 2016 Laredo, TX] - Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials in Texas are facing pressure from elected officials, advocates, and medical professionals nationwide as the medical condition of “Maribel,” an asylum-seeker who has been detained for over a

year, rapidly deteriorates. The Black Alliance for Just Immigration joins in calling for Maribel’s immediate release and raise concerns for her health and treatment at the hands of ICE and detention officers.

Maribel’s neglect and mistreatment at the hands of ICE is a clear example of how Black women are treated in custody. She came to the US. for safety after suffering horrific violence, and here her life is in danger because of the racist and sexist ICE system that ignores her case for asylum, and the detention officers punishing her for her protest and disregarding her illness,” says Opal Tometi, Director of Black Alliance for Just Immigration and Co-Founder Black Lives Matter.

Maribel, a Black-Garifuna migrant, fled Honduras over a year ago fearing gang violence based on her family ties and ethnicity after surviving sexual assault and threats to her life and loved ones. The immigration judge overseeing her asylum claim deemed Maribel not to have an objective basis for her fear. Despite evidence to the contrary, including the disappearance of Maribel’s partner, with whom she left Honduras to seek asylum in the U.S following the murder of his father and brother. He is also presumed dead and now Maribel is a target of this same group responsible for this deadly violence, should she be deported to Honduras.

Maribel also suffers from sickle cell disease causing a number of acute and chronic health problems, such as severe infections, attacks of severe pain (“sickle-cell crisis”), stroke, and an increased risk of death. The complications of sickle-cell disease can be prevented to a large extent with proper medical treatment, however ICE has ignored Maribel’s health needs and, on occasion, even punished her for fainting. According to Maribel’s attorneys, “Maribel is in need of immediate medical attention by health professionals who understand sickle cell disease.”

Until recently, ICE, as well as officials from the Correctional Corporation of America managed Laredo Detention Center where Maribel is housed, denied knowledge of her illness, despite having access to Maribel’s medical records and numerous pleas from her attorneys and supporters.

Supporters speculate that the neglect and punitive treatment

Black Leaders Demand Release of Chronically Ill Asylum Seeker Suffering in Detention

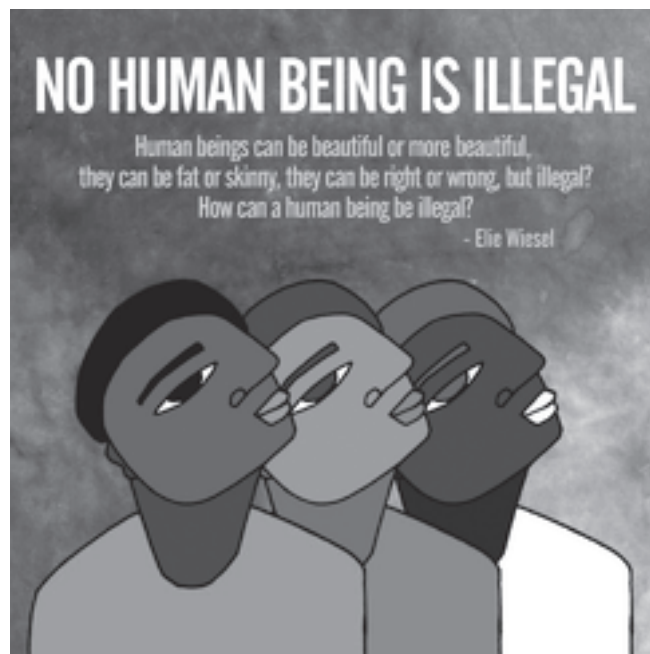
Decrying Racist and Sexist Abuse by ICE and Detention Officers

of Maribel at the hands of ICE officials is retaliation for her participation in a hunger-strike at the Hutto Detention Center last October, along with 27 other women. After the hunger strike, Maribel was placed in solitary confinement, where access to her family, friends, and legal counsel was limited. Shortly thereafter, she was transferred to the Laredo Detention Center, without notice to her legal counsel.

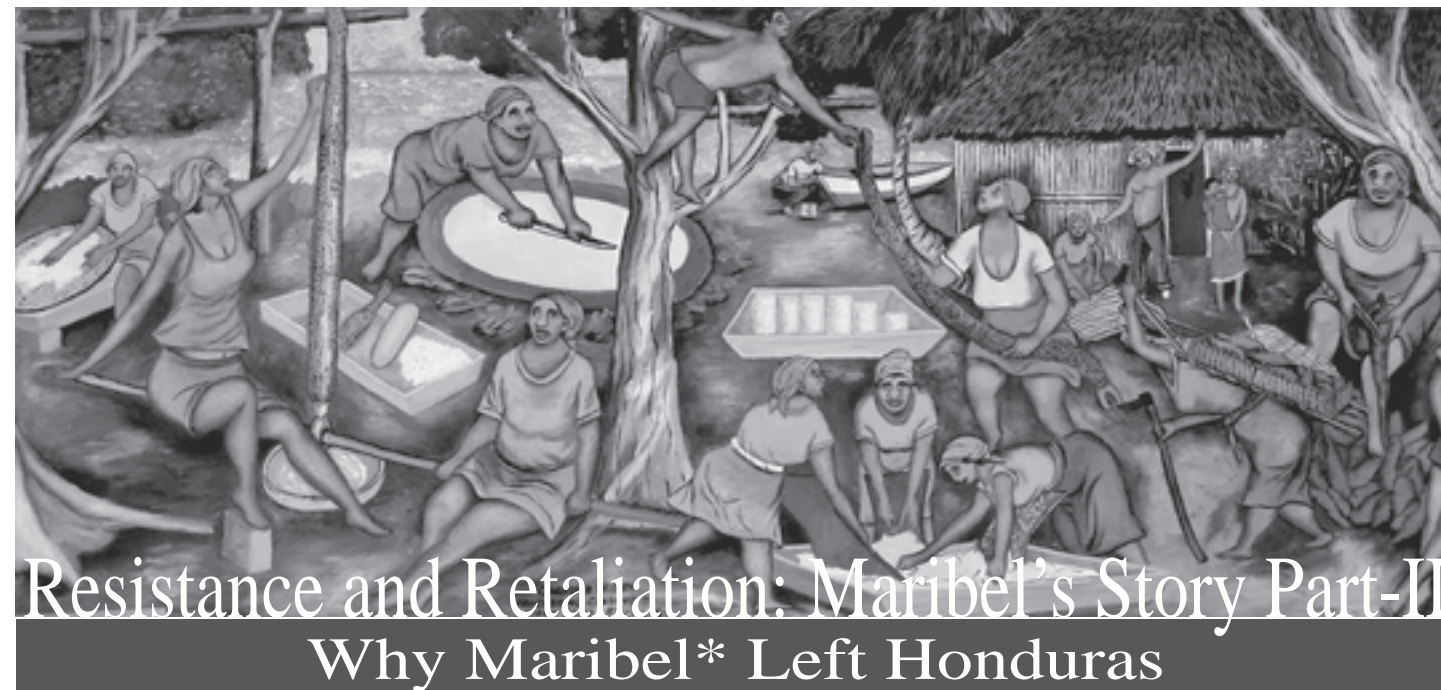
Since being transferred to Laredo, Maribel has observed blood in her urine on a regular basis and suffered from kidney, liver, and heart pain, as well as depression and inflammation.

The Black Alliance for Just Immigration and supporters across the country are calling on the Department of Homeland Security to grant Maribel discretionary relief by administratively closing her case because she faces real danger should she be forced to return to Honduras. This would also ensure that Maribel obtains proper medical attention and care necessary to reverse her failing health.

The Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI) believes that a thriving multi-racial democracy requires racial, social and economic justice for all. African Americans and black immigrants are stronger together and we can win by becoming leaders in the fight against structural racism and systemic discrimination. BAJI was formed to bring Black voices together to advocate for equality and justice in our laws and our communities.



Artwork: Favianna Rodriguez



Artwork: Garifuna women processing casava by B. Nicholas.

Resistance and Retaliation: Maribel’s Story Part-II Why Maribel* Left Honduras

By Virginia Raymond

Editor’s note: In the February issue of La Voz de Esperanza, Virginia Raymond wrote Maribel’s Story Part-I recounting her incarceration at the T. Don Hutto Residential Center where she was placed in solitary confinement after participating in a hunger strike with other immigrant women protesting conditions at the prison. In part II, she recounts why she initially left her home for the U.S.

*Maribel’s full name is not used in order to protect her identity.

The following is an abridged version of Maribel’s declaration — mostly in her own words — translated by Adriana Murga Gonzalez, a student at the University of Texas at Austin, with some modifications by Professor Olga Lydia Herrera of St. Thomas University, St. Paul, Minnesota. I have edited this declaration for length, have removed names, places, dates, and numerous other identifying details, and have added a few words and phrases for clarity. I have the original in my office.

—Virginia Raymond

...

I am a Garifuna woman born in Honduras and I speak Garifuna and Spanish fluently. Although I was born in a town on the coast, I lived for more than twenty years in a larger city inland. We, my family, are very upright and hard-working people. We make a living by selling many different types of bread – coconut bread- coconut water- coconut oil-coconut soup and coconut craft. We also sell fried fish, and shark oil. We go out and sell our products under the sun and the rain to survive; we carry our products in our heads and yell to catch’s customers’ attention. Our mother raised us this way, and she gave my siblings and me our education. We

never received support from anyone, just my mother’s work and effort and our own work and effort.

I have three children. When I was two months pregnant with my first child, the father of my child disappeared. I never found him, not even at the morgue. He completely disappeared, which is common in my city. My mother supported me with my pregnancy and she helped me give labor. I had my first child in the hands of my mother. Thanks to God, everything went well.

A friend of mine told me that he would give his last name to my child, that there was no problem in doing that and that he would support me. He went and met my child. That is why my first child has his last name. He is a Garifuna man; a very good man and he helped us in the ways he could.

A year later, I met my ex-husband. Let us call him “Mal Hombre” or “MH” for the purpose of this essay. I began a romantic-relationship with him like all of the couples. When we had six months dating, he moved in to my room. When we had eight months dating, I realized that I was pregnant. He hit me and raped me every time he came home high. He did not feed me and sometimes he would leave me locked up. I began to see what he was: a monster disguised as a person. Everyday he would hit me. When I was five months pregnant — it was a holiday — he hit me for no reason. My aunt, my sisters, and my mother intervened to help me. They would yell at him “Let her go! Don’t hit her! She can lose the baby!” But he dragged my aunt and me and caused my aunt’s knees to bleed and pinched us both because the women in my family were intervening and not permitting him to keep hurting me. They did not let him take me because he could kill my baby and me because he was drugged, drunk, and aggressive.

MH was a maniac and a psychopath. He would rape me from behind and through all of the parts of my body. I would let him because I was too scared of him. One day I went

outside to wash diapers and when I went back inside, I saw something horrible. I began to cry when I saw MH giving my child his penis and my child would lick it because every time my child cried he always did this and would touch my child's private parts. I told him "MH, don't do that to your child!" and he yelled at me: "Shut up bitch, if you tell your mother or anyone what you saw I will kill you. You know me and I will chop you and I will bury you."

He would hit me and when I came back from selling bread, I had to give him 100 pesos for his marijuana. He would demand me to cook good food without him working. If I did

not he would hit me and he would tell me that if he found any money on me he would take it and steal it. He took everything, even our children's things, everything from me to sell it to buy his drugs,

Later, various people told me: "Maribel, your husband works with a gang, what I will call, for

the purpose of this essay, 'Los Diablos.' He is killing gang-members, he is stealing cars, he is stealing motorcycles, he is raping many women at midnight, he is kidnapping. They say he is a hit man."

I wondered what he did with all of the money he got for killing, and people told me that he used it to buy cocaine. He would snort the cocaine, and also he would invite his colleagues and friends to drink; they would go to the club and get women and when he was drugged, he would kill them. He told me this from his own mouth. He told me, that they took the women who prostituted themselves at the corner robbed them and raped them. Then to not have to pay them, they kill them.

When MH killed a member of a rival gang, some members of that gang shot him in revenge. Then MH killed another member of that gang. This is why the relatives of the people MH killed want to kill me and my children. They say we have to pay what MH did, but neither my children nor I have killed anyone.

After I left MH, I met another man and began living with him. I will call him "Angel" for the purposes of this essay. "Angel," like me, was Garifuna. And like me, he was trying to escape from people who were trying to kill him: Angel's father and brother had already been murdered, so Angel was also afraid. [The reasons why people were after Angel make

for another, also complicated and long story. Suffice to say that he had a very well founded fear of persecution.] We lived together in my house until some men from MH's gang told me that I had to leave.

This is what happened. On, a certain day, Los Diablos came and told me that if I wanted to continue living in my house, I had to be with the boss of the gang.

A few days later, they came and told me that if I wanted to keep living there I would have to take a Blackberry cellphone and put drugs into my vagina to take into the city jail. I just answered, "Give me time to think about it." I always said that for fear. They also asked me to sell marijuana.

I never decided to do what they wanted me to do and within three weeks, they came to my house. A bunch of them came in through the roof at about two o'clock in the morning. They stayed until 5:00 a.m., raping me. They raped through every part of me and gave me diseases from this rape; I received treatment for those problems. Three days later, they came again at 11:30 in the morning and

they yelled at me "N..., [racial epithet] you have 24 hours to leave or we are going to come and kill you." They said horrible things and they went away, but they returned at 2:30 pm with guns. Many guns: R15s, M16s, and AK-47s. All the men were armed.

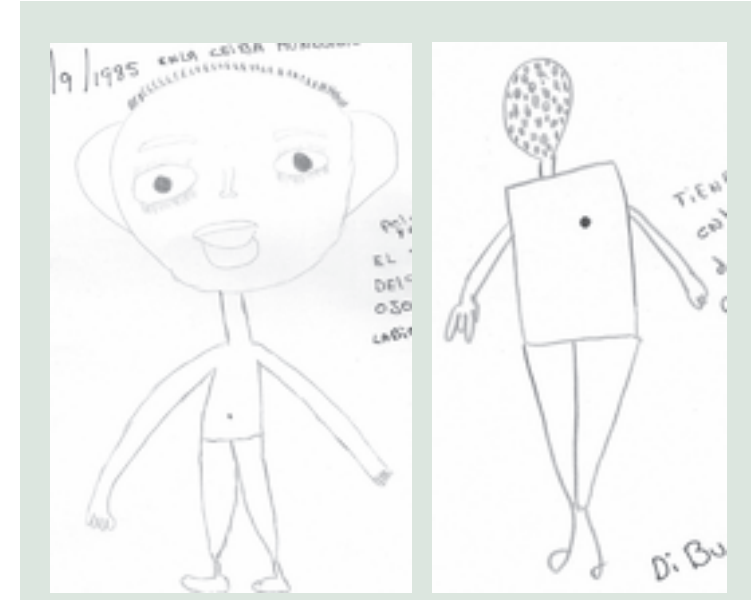
They yelled at me and my family: "You no longer have 24 hours. Instead you have 2 hours did you hear? Or else we kill you and your children: this and much more." Horrible things were done to me. We left and went to another place to live. But after we were there for a week, one of my children came home and told me that she had seen the gang member, one of those who raped me and threatened to kill us, in a store nearby. That is when we decided to leave Honduras.

I, Maribel, give permission to share this declaration of mine because I fear for my life because of everything I have lived through with the gang members and the mistreating from the father of my children. I want to take them out of Honduras before they get killed by the gang members or raped by their father, since he is a psychopath maniac he is capable of doing something. Thank you and I give my permission.

Signed by: *Maribel*
December 25th 2015



Artwork: Garifuna women by Virginia Castillo



Drawings of Angel by Maribel. (L) She described him as tall, with large lips and thick hair. At right, the drawing shows a scar on his back left from a .22 bullet wound he sustained when shot by gang members in Honduras.

When Maribel and Angel arrived in the U.S., they were arrested by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and separated. Angel was sent to the South Texas Detention Complex in Pearsall, run by the for-profit prison company GEO. Maribel was sent to the T. Don Taylor detention center (although it's called a "residential" center) run by the for-profit Corrections Company of America (CCA). Neither Angel nor Maribel found pro bono lawyers to assist them (the need is far greater than the supply of free legal assistance). Both went to hearings in front of immigration judges unrepresented. Both of them lost their claims for asylum.

It is clear from the transcript that Maribel's story — which is much abbreviated here — came across as confusing. It's also clear that she was very upset and made erroneous assumptions about what the judge knew. American Gateways staff helped Maribel fill out a form to appeal her case, but Angel apparently did not appeal. He was returned to Honduras. Maribel participated in the hunger strike at Hutto; a week later, she was moved to Laredo. During that week, she

learned that Angel had disappeared and is presumed murdered. What can you do? You should pressure your U.S. Congressional Representatives and Senators and President Obama to grant Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to people from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

The desolate situation in these three countries — the Northern Triangle of Central America — is unspeakable. If people can receive TPS because their lives have been overturned by a hurricane, earthquake, or volcano, so too should the U.S. grant humanitarian relief when lives and communities are destroyed or threatened by pervasive violence.

Bio: Virginia Raymond (in her own head) is an unemployed professor of literature, anthropology, history, and Mexican American Studies and can belt out powerful songs in the key of joyous melancholy sounding a lot like Mercedes Sosa.

Note: At Press Time, Maribel had been released on bond.

IWD MARCH - SATURDAY MARCH 5, 2016

10 am - Gather @ Plaza de Zacate
Next to Downtown Mercado
501 W. Commerce St. SA TX

11 am- March begins
Rally & speakers after the March

www.sawomenwillmarch.org

¡Mujeres Marcharán!