

Mass Mobilization to Brownsville, Texas

Monday October 8, 2018

(Indigenous Peoples/Columbus Day)

**Shut Down Child Detention Centers - Stop Family Detention
Asylum for ALL - Trump Must Resign or Be Removed!**

Contact bamn@umich.edu for more info
www.gofundme.com/stopchilddetention

On August 22, 2018, a group of BAMN leaders, including BAMN National Chairperson Shanta Driver, went to Brownsville, Texas to learn more about the community and the conditions in Casa Padre--the largest youth detention center in the country. We also went to learn more about the conditions at the detention centers in the Brownsville area which are being cynically named as national "family reunification" centers--code for the Trump administration to re-establish the illegal and inhumane practice of indefinite family detention in violation of the *Flores* Federal consent decree.

In 1985, immigrant youth were being held in brutal family detention facilities, some forced to endure daily strip searches in facilities that included adult men and women. The children and families received barely any semblance of medical, educational, or recreational services. After suits were filed and a series of court decisions, all parties agreed to a settlement, indefinite family detention was ruled illegal, and most of these facilities were shut down. *Flores v Reno* requires the government to release young people being held in detention facilities within 20 days, and also bars the government from detaining the children in mixed gender detention centers. Yet Trump is still holding youth in these family detention facilities today. Many of the pictures of children sleeping in cages come from these facilities. In July, Trump petitioned a Federal judge in California to convert thousands of beds in old military bases into "family detention" to restore this practice wholesale. The judge rejected Trump's motion, but it's clear that these "family reunification" centers like the one in Brownsville are Trump's illegal attempt to recreate the same practice of indefinite family detention, and to fast track wholesale deportation of families to the dangerous and deadly conditions that they had fled to begin with.

In addition, in June 2018 Jeff Sessions unilaterally changed the longstanding law by which families and

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individuals who come to the United States can legally seek asylum on the basis of gang violence and domestic violence. People who had entered the country legally on the basis of the claim of gang violence or domestic violence have now been declared illegal. Instead of being released on bond or parole, or receiving asylum, countless youth, families, and individuals have had the rug pulled out from under them and face indefinite detention or deportation to their death.

The movement needs to take up the goal of restoring the right to asylum on the basis of gang and domestic violence and to once again shut down indefinite family detention now. We need to give a ringing defeat to Donald Trump and his rabid racist base. The only way to stop all the legal and extra-legal attacks on asylum seekers being ruthlessly pursued by Donald Trump is to beat him in public. We need to force Donald Trump to resign or be removed to protect the rights and dignity of people desperately seeking sanctuary in the U.S. What our borders really need protection from is the abuses and tyranny of ICE and the whole cruel Trump-Sessions regime.

To achieve these essential aims, the movement has to broaden, deepen, and escalate its struggle to defend basic human rights.

One of the two facilities slated to become family detention centers is the notorious Port Isabel Detention

Center, which has been the site of numerous hunger strikes and protest actions inside by detainees. The violent sub-human and torturous conditions in Port Isabel were described in a book by a former guard at the center, Tony Hefner, called *Between the Fences: Before There was Guantanamo There Was Port Isabel Service Processing Center*. This place has needed to be shut down for years. The movement cannot permit Port Isabel to become ICE's latest attempt to cover for its inability to unite children with parents by opening up a phony "family reunification center." Port Isabel is on a relatively isolated road on the outskirts of Brownsville. The second facility which ICE may already be using for family detention is the Cameron County Detention Center, which is right in downtown Brownsville. This facility is within marching distance from some Brownsville high schools and from the campuses of University of Texas Brownsville and Texas Southmost College.

The other reason for the August trip was to get a feel for Brownsville, its history, and its economic and social conditions, and to see how the bridges linking Brownsville to Mexico function. What we learned is that Brownsville is 92% Latino, one of the poorest cities in the nation, and has a NAFTA Free Trade Zone, which is one of the largest ports in the country from which goods (but not people) travel legally and freely to and from Central and Latin America. Our most important findings were that Brownsville's Latina/o community exudes a confidence and sense of its power which are palpable. At the same time it is clear that Brownsville is one of those places in which the old Jim Crow did not miss a beat when Brownsville transformed into a center of the new Jim Crow. Brownsville is now a place in which legal segregation no longer exists, but the de-facto segregation and inequality between the Latina/o community living in the center of Brownsville and the white communities along the beltway of Brownsville are obvious and unmistakable.

The Resistance, the mass movement against Trump and his vision for America, needs a victory in Brownsville to launch a new phase of struggle for immigrant rights, equality, open borders, and basic human rights. Unfortunately, on our visit to Brownsville in August, we had too little time to mobilize and organize in Brownsville to shut down Port Isabel, win the asylum for mothers and children languishing in the concentration camps of the Port Isabel and Cameron County Detention Centers, and to end a new era of family detention centers. Naturally, there have been protests focused in Brownsville in the past, including the recent past. Busloads of immigrant rights activists have come to Brownsville to fight for the closure of Casa Padre and other Southwest Keys children and youth

detention centers and to force ICE to reunite children and parents. These demonstrations have helped to awaken the nation to what Donald Trump's immigration policies are. What is needed now is a more systematic ongoing campaign in Brownsville. Dr. King needed Bull Connor and the battle to break the back of segregation to build the civil rights movement on a national scale. We need to repeat now, in 2018 in Brownsville, TX what Dr. King achieved in 1963 in Birmingham, Alabama through a mass mobilization in which Dr. King and an army of black youth inspired the nation, defeated Bull Connor and his racist cops, and began to break the back of segregation across the South. From this victory, Dr. King went on to the August 1963 March on Washington and building the civil rights movement that transformed the struggle for racial equality on a national scale.

The greatest and best chance of victory for our movement lies in mobilizing Brownsville to take action. We need time to do the serious and concerted work of mobilizing Brownsville's proud and strong Latina/o community, expand outreach nationally for support for Brownsville and immigrant rights, and so tip the balance of power in favor of human rights and against all Trump's racist attacks. When that huge sleeping giant of Brownsville and the new national movement awakens, victory will be within sight.

BAMN's strategy is to both organize a new integrated youth-led immigrant rights and civil rights movement in Brownsville and to work together with every group that is fighting for immigrant rights and/or to force Donald Trump to resign or be removed to build protests and launch a new phase of struggle in Brownsville on October 8, 2018. We will use the next month to implement our plan. We intend to return to Brownsville as much as possible during September. October 8 is a short time from now but with consistent organizing, outreach and fundraising, we can make October 8 our holiday, a day of celebration and growth for the movement.

We know we can win important victories for the movement in Brownsville. And we know that Donald Trump must resign or be removed now to lessen the toll on human lives created by the new policy of Attorney General Sessions and Donald Trump to deny mothers, children, youth, and others fleeing from gang and/or domestic abuse to file for asylum in the United States. Our movement can force Trump and Sessions to reverse this vicious and illegal policy. It is no exaggeration to say that the fate of humanity depends on our movement getting Donald Trump to resign or be removed now. We must win in Brownsville. October 8 provides an important turning point for our fight to succeed.