



SANCTIONED: Internal documents show that the Trump Administration knew about the devastating impact that visa sanctions would have on migrants from Eritrea and Cambodia

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In September 2017, The Trump Administration made an unprecedented decision to impose visa sanctions on four countries at once: Cambodia, Eritrea, Guinea, and Sierra Leone, targeting vulnerable refugees and immigrants who sought sanctuary from war, persecution, poverty, and violence.

The Trump Administration's stated reason for choosing to enforce the sanctions was that these countries had "delay[ed] or refuse[d] to issue travel documents" for people that ICE intended to deport. The administration further stated that sanctions would be lifted only if the country more aggressively cooperated with ICE's deportation plans. In other words: The government imposed visa sanctions with the explicit intent of facilitating and expediting the deportation of Black and Asian community members from our country.

In January 2019, after the Trump Administration refused to comply with its obligations under the Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA"), the Advancement Project filed a lawsuit on behalf of the UndocuBlack Network to demand information about the Administration's decision to impose visa sanctions against these four countries. The lawsuit is ongoing (with more documents on the way), but the newly revealed documents from the first stage of production show that the Trump Administration had full knowledge of the devastating impact that forced deportations would have on migrants from Eritrea and Cambodia. The documents also demonstrate the influence of the Center for Immigration Studies, a far-right group that has been identified as an anti-immigrant hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center, on members of the Trump Administration.

Below are a few notable excerpts:

The likelihood of imprisonment, torture, and death for migrants deported to Eritrea:

In March 2017, ICE received a letter from The America Team for Displaced Eritreans that detailed an "urgent request" to suspend deportations of Eritreans, who "would likely be imprisoned, tortured and even put to death by the Eritrean regime if they were removed to Eritrea before the country became safe." The letter attached findings of American and international human rights bodies, including the U.S. Department of State, that confirm the likelihood of imprisonment, torture, and death for deported Eritreans.

In December 2017, DHS received a joint urgent appeal by the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights

in Eritrea, and the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. The appeal was about the deportation of Eritreans, and it noted that those forcibly returned to Eritrea “are at high risk of being arrested and detained, and subjected to ill-treatment and torture,” including enslavement. The appeal asked, among other requests, that the U.S. government “provide information about any measures taken to guarantee the psychological and physical integrity of the Eritrean nationals if returned to their home country.”

The devastating impact of forced deportations on Cambodian refugees:

In July 2017, Delegations from the United States and Cambodia met to discuss the issue of repatriation. Notes from this joint commission meeting indicate that the Cambodian delegation relayed various concerns regarding the deportation of people to Cambodia, including that the “[d]eportation of refugees is against U.S. and international law, and does not reflect American values.” The Cambodian delegation observed that those who would be forcibly deported “have already paid their debt to society by serving time in prison,” would be “removed from their families” without “visiting rights to America,” and would endure “difficult” integration into Cambodian society. The Cambodian delegation then noted that four people forcibly deported to Cambodia have already died by suicide.

ICE OPLA subscription to weekly email updates by the anti-immigrant hate group Center for Immigration Studies:

ICE’s Office of the Principal Legal Advisor produced an email suggesting that someone in its office subscribes to weekly email updates by the anti-immigrant hate group Center for Immigration Studies. In late August 2017, one of these CIS weekly e-newsletters included a CIS opinion piece titled “Won’t Take Back Your Citizens? No Visas For You: Trump Pulls the Trigger on 243(d).”

[Updated from January 10, 2019.](#)

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