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Private Prison Co. Again Accused of Human Rights Abuses

Report: Immigrants in US Facility Held in "Atmosphere of Intimidation"

By JULIA DAHL August 5, 2008

BRIAN ROSS & COMPANY 8 comments

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A publicly traded company that runs private prison facilities across the country is again facing accusations of human rights abuses against inmates in its facilities.



Immigrants at a Washington State detention center run by the GEO Group, Inc. are being held in... (ABC News/Getty)

Immigrants at a Washington State detention center run by the GEO Group, Inc. are being held in conditions that violate both international and U.S. law, says a new report released by the Seattle University School of Law and the human rights group OneAmerica.

The report concludes that immigrants at the Northwest Detention Facility, including refugees and asylum seekers, are being held in "an atmosphere of intimidation" which includes verbal abuse, sexual harassment, strip searches, and poor to non-existent mental and physical health care.

While the Northwest Detention Facility in Tacoma, Washington is overseen by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) it is run the GEO Group.

This is not the first time GEO has been accused of violating the rights of inmates in its care.

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In 2000, when the company was known as Wackenhut Corrections Corporation, the U.S. Department of Justice sued them over "excessive abuse and neglect" of inmates at the Jena Juvenile Justice Center in Jena, Louisiana.

Two years later, three former employees were found guilty of civil rights conspiracy and obstruction including lying to investigators, in the aftermath of the beating of an inmate in a New Mexico facility.

And last October, the Texas Youth Commission removed inmates from one of the company's juvenile facilities after an official visited and determined the conditions were "unsafe."

Despite this, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger recently granted GEO a five-year, multi-million contract extension with the state.

Schwarzenegger's office referred ABC News to the California Department of Corrections, which oversees the contract, for comment. The department said that GEO, which currently operates four facilities in the state, has scored well on state audits thus far.

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