



ASYLUM SEEKER ADVOCACY PROJECT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 13, 2022

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Brooklyn Family Separated at Border Files Suit Against Government Over Inhumane Treatment, More than 2 Year Separation

Indigenous Guatemalan Mother and Son Were Separated in 2017 Under Trump Family Separation Border Policy, Denied Medical Attention While in Government Custody

BROOKLYN, NY – A Guatemalan family seeking asylum at the border has filed a lawsuit against the United States over their forced separation, which lasted nearly two-and-a-half years, and the harsh and inhumane treatment they suffered. The child was separated from his mother shortly after they arrived in the United States without explanation. The mother was held in Texas, under harsh and demeaning conditions imposed by immigration authorities, while the child was sent to a shelter.

For nearly a month, Leticia Peren and her son, Yovany, were not permitted to speak to each other and denied information about each other's whereabouts and well-being. While in government custody, Ms. Peren was denied medical care and coerced into deportation, causing mother and son to be separated for two-and-a-half years. The family's lawsuit comes a year after the Biden administration walked away from settlement negotiations with families like theirs, who were separated under the Trump administration.

"We are raising our voices to seek justice, but not only for our family," said **Leticia Peren, an Indigenous Guatemalan woman who was separated from her child at the border.** "Like I told my son, by speaking up we are also giving voice to all the other families who were separated under this cruel policy, who lived through the abuse that we lived through at the hands of U.S. government agents. We are fighting for all the families who are still separated to this day. We want to make sure that the U.S. government will never again tear apart families who are trying to find safe haven and build a new life in the U.S."

"No one should have to go through what my mother and I went through; the fear, the uncertainty, the hopelessness. I still live with it every day. The trauma doesn't go away, it stays with you. Many of the families who have been reunited like ours are still at risk of

being deported to countries where they fear for their lives. This is what motivates me to share my story and keep fighting for justice,” said **Yovany, who was separated from his mother at the border at the age of 15, detained, held in a shelter for months, then placed in foster care.** Yovany did not see his mother for 792 days.

“Leticia and her son arrived at the U.S. border seeking safety and instead were detained, abused, and ultimately separated for almost two-and-a-half years. What the government did to them, and thousands of others, under the Trump Family Separation Policy is abhorrent,” said **Conchita Cruz, Co-Executive Director at the Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP)**, which is representing Leticia Peren and her son in the lawsuit. “The Department of Justice under the Biden administration is re-traumatizing separated families with aggressive litigation tactics. Without courageous asylum seekers like Leticia and her son, Yovany, fighting to hold the government accountable, there is nothing to prevent the government from making family separation a policy again.”

ASAP and Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, LLP represent the family in this lawsuit, which was filed on Monday, December 12, 2022 in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York. The lawsuit seeks monetary damages for the trauma and injuries suffered as a result of family separation. The complaint outlines wrongdoing by government officials at the Department of Homeland Security’s Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, and the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement.

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The Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP) believes that asylum seekers can make great change by joining together. We provide our membership of asylum seekers with legal and community support. We work with our members - more than 400,000 asylum seekers from over 175 countries who now live across every U.S. state and territory - to amplify their voices and build a more welcoming United States. For more information please visit www.asylumadvocacy.org.