



Lilian Castillo

“My son lost his childhood in that center.”

While listening to her long and appalling description of conditions at the Karnes County Residential Center, an immigration detention facility near San Antonio, you quickly understand what a strong woman Lilian Castillo is. But when the subject turns to her only child, Lilian finally begins to lose her composure.

And why not? After all, it was to save her eight-year-old son, Jose, from the brutal violence plaguing their home in Honduras that she’d undertaken the long and risky journey to reach the United States. She was determined to offer him something better than an early death at the hands of the criminal gangs that control so much of Honduran society, giving it one of the highest murder rates in the world.

Who among us would harshly judge a mother for trying to deliver a brighter future for her child? Inexcusably, our own Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) did.

For ten months, ICE locked Lilian and Jose in the Karnes detention center—for all practical purposes a prison camp, surrounded by razor wire fencing, and a grossly inappropriate environment for any child.

Ten months of inadequate medical care and malnutrition. Ten months of abuse and the ever-present threat of solitary confinement in the “cold room.” Ten months of living with the fear of sexual

assault by the guards. Ten months of treatment so unconscionable it provoked at least one suicide attempt by a fellow prisoner and drove Lilian and other women to go on a hunger strike. Ten months of wondering whether she’d lost all hope for her son’s future.

Lilian and Jose came to this country in search of sanctuary—but were met instead with cruelty and abuse at the hands of our own government.

And then UUSC entered the picture. We’ve partnered with the Refugee and Immigration Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES), a grassroots organization, to provide legal and casework assistance to thousands of mothers like Lilian caught in the immoral machinery of the broken U.S. immigration system.

RAICES helps these refugees assert their rights and navigate ICE’s complex legal and bureaucratic rules. Once women and children are released, the organization also connects them with local families for temporary housing and support before they are, typically, reunited with relatives elsewhere in the United States.

The lawyer RAICES provided helped Lilian convince a judge, finally, to release her and Jose—and, as Lilian puts it, “gave me hope that I had a chance here in the United States.”

Today, Lilian and her boy are living in New York with her sister. And what of Jose’s future?

“I see the happiness in my son’s eyes, and I don’t think I’ve ever seen that happiness before. I want to keep moving forward. I know everything will fall into place.”

Go deeper and take action:

- Learn more about what UUSC is doing to fix the broken immigration system at uusc.org/immigration.
- Follow us on Facebook (facebook.com/uusc4all) and Twitter ([@uusc](https://twitter.com/uusc)) to learn more about breaking events in our work for immigration reform and other campaigns.