

As Cold as ICE: A visit to the Grand Junction ICE Offices

On December 31, 2009 at approximately 2:00 pm, eight representatives of area Faith-based organizations (Hispanic Affairs Project, Grand Valley Peace & Justice and Koinonia Church) visited a facility operated by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at 571 S. Commercial Drive in Grand Junction. The facility had heretofore been unknown in our community. Our visit was in response to an article in the 1/4/2010 issue of *The Nation* by Jacqueline Stevens talking about “hidden” detention centers located nationwide.

The brown block building in the industrial section of Grand Junction is non-descript with no signs identifying it as government office or ICE facility. When we arrived we rang the doorbell and an ICE officer who was outside came and asked what we wanted. We introduced ourselves and our purpose and he responded that the building was just a “booking center” and that they never held people in the facility. He said detainees were always housed at local jails and the facility was just a transit point.

When we inquired as to the man’s identity he refused to divulge it and said we could call him “Guy.” After a few questions, we asked if we could speak with his supervisor. He told us we were not allowed in the building because of homeland security concerns. So Guy went into the building and after about ten minutes a woman came out who introduced herself as Kate Malapanes (KM).

We again introduced ourselves and our mission and KM reiterated the facility was just a holding cell and that detainees were never held there overnight. She laughed at the suggestion it was detention center. She said people might be transferred from outlying areas and would be “processed” in the office and housed in local jails. When we expressed our desire to be able to provide spiritual counsel to detainees and offer assistance, her response was that those services were available in the jails. Guy had said that detainees at this location were given complete access to phones and that they could call whomever they wanted. When we described *The Nation* article she said she hadn’t read it and would have to talk to her own supervisor. KM then went back into her offices and left us standing outside for approximately 30 minutes.

When KM returned she had a notepad with numerous notes and proceeded to tell us that the article in *The Nation* was totally false and filled with factual errors. KM reiterated that no one was detained in their facility for more than 10 hours. When we asked if we could look at the records of those who had been processed there, we were told that they were inaccessible, due to homeland security precautions. We asked for the identity of the person who provided her with this information, and for KM’s card. She went back into her office and after about 15 minutes returned with her card. The card identified her as:

Catherine Malapanes
Supervisory Detention and Deportation Officer
US Department of Homeland Security 970-241-3791 x 209 ofc

Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Detention and Removal Operations
571 S. Commercial Dr.
Grand Junction, CO 81505

970-241-3648 fax
catherine.malapanes@dhs.gov

She also gave us the following information for the person we should call if we have further inquiries:

John Longshore
Field Office Director
720-873-2899

Our group left the parking lot (where these conversations had taken place), and followed up with a brief discussion at Koinonia Church where the following questions and observations were noted:

1. KM said the facility is not a detention facility, but if people are being held for up to ten hours then they *are being detained*. The question arises as to adequacy of facilities such as bathrooms, chairs, cots, etc. These are health and safety issues that need to be addressed for the comfort and safety of detainees.
2. In addition to physical facilities there is also the question of services. If detainees are being transported and processed over lengthy time spans what provisions are made for adequate nutrition, medical care for fragile individuals, etc.?
3. KM said that phone privileges were available at the local jails. If a person is detained in Meeker, transported to GJ, processed, and then transported to the local jail it could conceivably take 24 to 36 hours for this process to occur. In the meantime family members and friends would be out of touch with the detainee and the detainee would have no ability to make contact.
4. The fact that ICE has no publicly accessible and up-to-date list of detainees means it is impossible to track the location of people. At the same time these people are being removed from the location of their resources and documentation and as *The Nation* rightly notes are unable to mount any kind of defense to their detention.

We agreed on the following actions in response to the visit:

- 1) We would contact the ACLU to investigate.
- 2) We would make appointments with John Salazar and Mike Bennett's local offices to bring this to their attention.
- 3) We would contact Jacqueline Stevens, the journalist who wrote the piece in *The Nation* to let her know of our experience and that ICE claims her story is not based on facts.