

Media Advisory

International, Canadian experts call for an end to immigration detention

(Montreal, June 20, 2018) Leading international experts on immigration detention issued two joint statements today urging [Canada](#) and [other governments](#) to put an end to this harmful practice, stating that, “As a matter of principle, individuals should not be placed in immigration detention or separated from their families.”

These experts are meeting in Montreal to discuss global trends and avenues for change in immigration detention at the international conference, “[Challenging Migrant Detention: Human Rights, Advocacy and Mental Health](#)” (June 19-21).

The 50 signatories of the joint statements include academics, lawyers, clinicians and advocates, notably:

- François Crépeau, Hans & Tamar Oppenheimer Chair in Public International Law at McGill University and former UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants;
- Mary Bosworth, Director of the Centre for Criminology and Director of Border Criminologies, Faculty of Law, University of Oxford;
- Michael Bochenek, Senior Counsel, Children’s Rights Division, Human Rights Watch;
- Cécile Rousseau, Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry, McGill University and Scientific Director of the Sherpa Research Centre;
- Laurence J. Kirmayer, James McGill Professor, Department of Psychiatry, on behalf of the McGill Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry;
- Jared Will, lawyer;
- Robyn Sampson, Acting Director, on behalf of the International Detention Coalition;
- Samer Muscati, Director and Hanna Gros on behalf of the International Human Rights Program of the University of Toronto;
- Jenny Jeanes, on behalf of Action Réfugiés Montreal.

“When it comes to the use of detention or family separation, there is no justification for treating migrants differently than we would citizens” said Dr. Janet Cleveland, legal scholar, psychologist and researcher at the Sherpa Research Centre. “As human beings, we all share the same fundamental right to liberty and family unity. These rights are also essential to our mental well-being. Studies around the world have consistently shown that immigration detention and family separation are harmful to migrants’ mental health.”

The Canada Border Services Agency detains thousands of migrants and asylum seekers every year, including children, victims of torture, and individuals with mental health conditions. The majority of immigration detainees are held without any suspicion that they pose a danger to the public. Canada remains one of the only countries in the world without a legislative limit to the length of detention, and some immigration detainees are held for years in maximum-security provincial jails without a countdown to their date of release. Despite recent efforts by the Canadian government to address issues in the immigration detention system, this year Canada has seen a sharp rise in the number of immigration detainees for the first time since 2012.

The second joint statement targeting the international community similarly appealed to governments from around the world to halt harmful detention and deterrence practices that are leading to severe violations of people’s fundamental human rights.

“Detention is harmful to everyone who experiences it,” said Dr. Rachel Kronick, a child psychiatrist at the Jewish General Hospital and Assistant Professor at the McGill University Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry. “But it is particularly devastating to the mental health of vulnerable individuals, such as children, who may suffer permanent damage even after relatively brief periods in detention.”

There are viable non-coercive alternatives to immigration detention that allow authorities to effectively manage immigration cases while respecting basic human rights. The joint statements called on Canada and the international community to live up to its moral and legal obligations by ceasing “the human rights violations of already marginalized and vulnerable individuals”.

Last October, a coalition of Canadian and international human rights organizations — including the International Human Rights Program at the University of Toronto, Amnesty International, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, and Justice for Children and Youth – delivered a [joint submission](#) to the UN Human Rights Council for Canada’s third Universal Periodic Review. The submission noted that immigration detainees, particularly children and individuals with mental health conditions, continue to suffer significant human rights violations in Canada.

“It is high time for Canada to meaningfully take up this longstanding issue and become the global leader on human rights that migrants and asylum seekers so desperately need,” said Hanna Gros, an advocate with the International Human Rights Program at the University of Toronto.

Links:

[Canadian statement](#)

[International statement](#)

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