

DEPORTED DIASPORA

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Shuya Ohno, Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition, at (617) 821-8990
Dimple Rana, Deported Diaspora, at (781) 521-4544 or DeportedDiaspora@gmail.com

Website: www.myspace.com/deporteddiaspora

LOWELL COMMUNITY DENOUNCES SWEEPS BY IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT AGENCY

LOWELL, MA –Affected family, community members and local leaders are gathering on Friday, August 8, 2008 in solidarity against the recent Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE) sweeps. In the past five days, ICE has targeted Lowell, MA, where it has the second largest Cambodian American community in the U.S., and has thus far detained approximately 25 Cambodian American individuals. Most are being transferred out of state within 24 hours of detention, cut off completely from family and legal assistance. Families and community members are facing difficulties in connecting with their loved ones in detention centers because detainees were transferred quickly without sufficient information provided to families.

The United Teen Equality Center (UTE) Executive Director, Gregg Croteau, talked about the difficulty of this being portrayed as such a black and white issue. He talks about one of the young men who was detained, “He grew up in the area for over 25 years, after arriving in the U.S. from Cambodia as a refugee when he was 3 years old. He has been working for over 6 years now as a youth worker assisting teens in crisis and serving as a productive community member. According to his many friends and family members, he has completely turned his life around in a very positive and uplifting way. He has had no new charges in over 7 years, never spent any time in prison, and has never been ordered to be deported. Yet, he was detained during the night as part of one of the recent ICE raids with no notification or explanation provided to his immediate family, and he is now being lumped into a group of individuals depicted by ICE as ‘violent transnational gang members.’ As the only income-provider for his family, his removal dramatically affected the livelihood of his 3- and 9-year-old children, in addition to the many young people who he has counseled and inspired.”

A Lowell community vigil will hold at 6 pm at Clemente Park on Middlesex Street across from Palin Plaza. The vigil will demonstrate the solidarity community members have with those detained and for those who may be deported on August 14 to Cambodia. Know Your Rights materials will be passed out to educate the community about the ICE sweeps and the upcoming consequences. The community is calling on ICE to stop the raids, provide information about recent sweeps, and allow family and community members to connect with those detained. Additionally, the community urges their Congressional members and local officials for an investigation and to pass city resolutions condemning the sweeps.

Participating organizations include Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Greater Lowell, Boston College Immigration & Asylum Project, Post-Deportation Human Rights Project, Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association, Deported Diaspora, Lowell Teen Coalition, Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition, Providence Youth Student Movement, Southeast Asian Coalition of Central Massachusetts, Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, The Public Policy Institute, United Teen Equality Center, and YWCA of Lowell.

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