

## SEPTEMBER: Hispanic and Latino Heritage

An excerpt from the written testimony of Clara Long before the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Reform, Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, July 11, 2019.<sup>i</sup>

“From June 17 to June 19, 2019, I was part of a team of lawyers, doctors and interpreters monitoring conditions for children in Border Patrol stations in the El Paso, Texas area on behalf of the class of children protected by the Flores Settlement Agreement. On June 17 and 19 I interviewed children detained at the Clint Border Patrol Station, and on June 18, I interviewed children and their families at the El Paso Station (also known as Station 1) and the Santa Teresa Border Patrol Station. I personally interviewed 16 detained children in these three facilities, while our monitoring team interviewed over 50 children throughout our visit.

Our in-depth interviews with children revealed that the US Border Patrol is holding many children, including some who are much too young to take care of themselves, in jail-like border facilities for weeks at a time without contact with family members, or regular access to showers, clean clothes, toothbrushes, or proper beds. Many were sick. Many, including children as young as 2 or 3, were separated from adult caretakers without any provisions for their care besides that provided by unrelated older children also being held in detention. These conditions are consistent with those Human Rights Watch documented in our February 2018 report, “In the Freezer.” In contrast with the conditions as of February 2018, the harms of CBP detention for children are now compounding over weeks instead of days.

On my first day at Clint, I spoke with an 11-year-old boy who was caring for his 3-year-old brother. Both were fending for themselves in cinder-block cells with dozens of other children for three weeks. When I met them, the little one was quiet with matted hair, a hacking cough, muddy pants and eyes that fluttered closed with fatigue. As we spoke, he fell asleep on two office chairs drawn together. “I am the one who takes care of him here,” the older brother told us. “There was a teenage girl with curly hair who was helping me take care of him for a while. I don’t know her name. But she’s gone now. Now, no one helps me to take care of him.” A 14-year-old told our team she was taking care of a 4-year-old girl who had been placed in her cell with no relatives. “I take her to the bathroom, give her my extra food if she is hungry, and tell people to leave her alone if they are bothering her,” she said. “She has been sick the whole time I have been taking care of her, and is coughing and has mucous. She doesn’t talk hardly at all, just ‘yes’ and ‘no.’ She wears diapers and I change them for her.”

An 11-year-old boy detained with his 9-year-old brother and 7-year-old sister told us, “Nobody takes care of us here. I try to take care of my little brother and sister since no one will take care of them. There are little kids here who have no one to take care of them, not even a big brother or sister. Some kids are only 2 or 3-years-old and they have no one to take care of them.”

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“Here the church, like every human being, is faced with the choice that is most fundamental for its faith: to be on the side of life or on the side of death. We see very clearly that on this point no neutrality is possible. Either we serve the life of the Salvadoran people or we connive in their death. Here, too, is the historical mediation of what is most fundamental in the Christian faith: either we believe in a God of life or we serve the idols of death” (Address at Louvain, Feb. 2, 1980; in SVF, p. 373).”

— Gustavo Gutiérrez, [We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People](#)

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<sup>i</sup> [https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/11/written-testimony-kids-cages-inhumane-treatment-border#\\_ftn4](https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/11/written-testimony-kids-cages-inhumane-treatment-border#_ftn4)