



Statement for International Migrants Day, December 18, 2016

Ms. Mariane Quintão, Youth Ambassador, Global Campaign to End Child Immigration Detention

I have recently finished a study comparing the United States and Australia's detention of migrant children: I want to share with you today some of my key findings in the hope that they can contribute to this discussion at a time when it is essential that we work together to end child detention.

My interest in this topic is deeply personal. I had been living in the United States for over 7 years when I was detained at the age of 17. Today I am 22, legally an adult and I have finished my first university degree - but I still think of how difficult it was to be locked up, isolated from my friends, family and any other thing that I'd be given the right to if I were free.

The large majority of children migrate because of poverty and violence in their home countries. In 2014, in the US, over 60,000 children were caught unaccompanied. The majority of these children came from Central America, where the economic difficulty and violence reign over El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and México.

A similar trend can be seen in Australia where in 2014 over 4,300 children were detained. Most of these children come from: Iran, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and other minority countries that are going through on-going conflicts.

We don't want these children to go from poverty, violence and conflict to immigration detention. Copious amounts of research have demonstrated that detention facilities lack proper education, medical care, counseling and even good infrastructure. Even short periods of detention can have devastating effects on a child. I personally have had to overcome trauma and depression from detention.

I was at the launch of the Campaign To End Immigration Detention of Children in 2012, where another former detainee shared the fact that

"it will always be behind our backs". The childhood memory of being detained is painful, and prolonged.

Now I'm pursuing my Masters Degree in International Law. I am an advocate, speaking out at events like these to highlight the fact that alternatives to immigration detention should always be used for children and their families.

Despite this progress, being detained as a child continues to have a very real impact on my life. I spent 10 years – 10 formative years - in the United States before I was detained and deported. It's where I grew up, had my first job and learned English.

I've applied to go back to the US and my visa has been denied. This is despite the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1990, in paragraph 9B, stating that, "No period of time in which an alien is under 18 years of age shall be taken into account in determining the period of unlawful presence in the United States under clause." This Law is clear, the fact that an immigrant child was detained cannot be taken against them upon the request for a visa. Yet, the reality is that my visa is denied, and many others who I know are in the same situation.

Supporting and enabling migrant children to participate in advocacy in a meaningful way is essential for us to navigate a path forward. As the global compacts develop for refugees and safe and orderly migration, I ask all of civil society to continue to raise the voices of those who have been in harmful immigration detention. I ask civil society to work with people who have been detained to contribute meaningfully to advocacy, providing more than just our story, but how we can contribute our ideas and our energy to this important cause.

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