

317 immigrants in Utah among 24,000 arrested nationwide after ignoring court orders to leave

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They came looking for Ana Corado as she was getting ready for work one morning in March at her Ogden condo.

The two men, U.S. immigration agents dressed in street clothes, asked the 23-year-old to identify herself. When she did, they arrested her because she had failed to leave Utah after a judge had ordered her family to do so years earlier. Corado, who has called Utah home for 16 years, thought her status was secure under her father's visa. It wasn't. Her parents were deported, too.

Corado and her parents are among 317 people in Utah who have been arrested in the past seven months by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement after being ordered by a judge to leave the United States, but who never did.

"This is not a surprise to these people," said Steven Branch, ICE field office director in Utah. "They ignored the orders and put themselves in this predicament."

The arrests are part of "Operation Return to Sender," an ICE initiative that was started in May 2006 to enforce deportation orders by immigration judges. About 52 teams, made up of an undisclosed number of ICE agents, are working on the project nationwide, ICE officials said.

Nationally, almost 24,000 people have been arrested. Of those, more than 13,000 people have been deported, said ICE spokeswoman Virginia Kice. Information about the destinations of the deportees was unavailable. In Utah, 197 of those arrested since September have been deported. Detainees who are not quickly expelled remain in ICE custody until the case is closed, Branch said. Cases are prioritized, he noted, with those deemed to be threats to national security or having criminal backgrounds at the top of the list.

In Corado's case, she was arrested March 22 and deported to Guatemala on April 19 - the day after her sister, Rosangela Herrera, became a U.S. citizen through marriage.

"They [the Corado family] exhausted their avenues of appeals and the order is final," Branch said.

Corado was flown to Guatemala City, where she took a bus to stay at an aunt's house in Santa Lucia Cotzumalguapa. Corado described the new town to her brother as "a strange place." She's struggling with living in a Spanish-speaking community. She has no friends, and she misses Utah.

Herrera, a 27-year-old mother of two, said she's "shocked" that ICE arrested her younger sister and deported her so quickly.

"She's done no wrong whatsoever," Herrera said. "It's frustrating seeing the [immigration] system be so corrupt because we've tried so hard to get adjustment of status."

However, Mike Sizer, a spokesman for Utahns For Immigration Reform and Enforcement, says he's glad to see that ICE is finally enforcing judges' orders for deportations, even though it is "difficult" on the families.

"It's something that's been overdue," he said of the arrests. "I understand the heartaches this causes, but they should have gotten their legal status before they moved here."

Ana Corado was 6 years old when her parents brought her and her two siblings to Utah on tourist visas in 1991. Her parents later applied for political asylum for the family and were denied, but they appealed it.

Corado's dad, a Baptist minister, applied for a religious worker visa in 2003, and the family thought it was covered by the visa. But after Corado's arrest and discussions with immigration attorneys, family members found out they were wrong.

"A lot of people tell you a lot of misinformation, and you don't know what to go by," said Corado's brother, Jose.

Corado's parents bought their own plane tickets and left Utah on Monday to join their daughter.

Jose Corado, 24, stayed behind and is praying for a miracle. He hopes he can get to stay here legally because he has terminal colon cancer. He has been dealing with the disease since he was diagnosed in January 2000. Corado has been through three surgeries and three treatments of chemotherapy. He doesn't know what kind of medical care he can get in Santa Lucia, and the

closest hospital is a three-hour drive away.

For now, he's just hanging onto his faith and leaning on his friends - who have organized a car wash fundraiser Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Saturn of Riverdale, 5212 Freeway Park Drive, to help pay his medical bills.

"I'm a vessel and wherever God wants to use me, whether it's in Utah, Colorado, or Guatemala, I know I'm still going to be used for his purpose and plan."

His deportation date is May 11.

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