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USA

Bring back Kilmar Armando Abrego García

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A growing movement of civil rights organizations, Latino community groups, labor unions, and legislators is demanding the return of Kilmar Armando Abrego García, who President Donald Trump had deported to a prison in El Salvador in violation of the U.S. Constitution, and they have pushed this case through the federal courts to the U.S. Supreme Court. Abrego García's case has at the same time become the center of the struggle between Trump and the courts, a contest that has now become a constitutional crisis, raising the question of whether the United States will remain a liberal democracy or become an authoritarian dictatorship.

On March 15, Abrego García, a Salvadoran immigrant who is married to a U.S. citizen and has three children who are U.S. citizens, was living legally in the United States when he was deported to the notorious terrorism confinement center prison (CECOT) in El Salvador. He was one of two plane loads of such migrants being deported to El Salvador without due process. He had "withholding of removal status" allowing him to live and work in the United States because he faced gang violence if he was returned to El Salvador.

The U.S. government accused him of being a member of the MS-13 gang, which it has designated as a terrorist organization. Yet Abrego García had never been convicted of a crime in either country. And he never had an opportunity to defend himself from deportation in court, violating the Constitution's "due process" provision. The Trump administration called his deportation an "administrative error" but argued that once he was in El Salvador, it was powerless to bring him back.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously on April 10 that Abrego García's deportation was illegal and that the government had to "facilitate" his release. Yet the Trump administration has not done so. Liberal Justice Ana María Sotomayor noted that this argument implied the government "could deport and incarcerate any person, including U.S. citizens..." So Abrego García has won broad support not only because of the obvious injustice in his case, but also because his deportation has come to be seen as a threat to all of us.

Abrego García's union's president, Michael Coleman of the International Association of Sheet Metal and Rail Transportation Workers, has spoken out strongly demanding his release and return to his family and his job. Similarly, CASA, the Latino immigrant organization based in Abrego García's home state of Maryland, also expressed its "outrage" and demanded his return to his community. U.S. Senator from Maryland Chris Van Hollen flew to El Salvador to demand Abrego García's release, and met with him, but Nayib Bukele, El Salvador's dictatorial president, said his government would keep him in prison there. Directing himself to Trump, Van Hollen said, "If you want to make claims about Mr. Abrego Garcia and MS-13, you should present them in the court, not over social media, not at press conferences."

Meanwhile, thousands have protested to demand Abrego García's release and return in Washington, D.C. and in state capitals. And in the second mass national protest against Trump involving hundreds of thousands throughout the country on April 19, many demanded justice for immigrants, including Abrego García.

This case and others like it are having an impact on the Supreme Court which at one in the morning on Saturday issued an order to stop Trump from deporting another couple of hundred immigrants from Texas to El Salvador. The Supreme Court had ruled earlier that immigrants must have advance notice of deportation and must have their day in court. And that is the real issue, will we have our rights or will we have a dictator?

The issue remains undecided in the Supreme Court, in the Congress, and among the people, many of whom are now

in the streets. So, the fight goes on and the chants continue, "Bring home Kilmar!"

PS:

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