

Cronkite News

Arizonans arrested for cuffing themselves to White House fence in protest

Wednesday, Sept. 18, 2013

Pei Li

WASHINGTON – Three Arizonans were among seven undocumented immigrants who handcuffed themselves to the White House fence and were arrested Wednesday as part of a protest against continued deportations.

“Not one more, not one more!” they chanted, in English and Spanish, as police and tourists looked on.

Police showed up within minutes and then watched for the next 30 minutes, along with a dozen or so supporters and organizers and the gawking tourists who snapped pictures of the protesters on the fence.

The protesters were then arrested without incident and taken to a local jail, where they were expected to be held at least until Wednesday evening.

Organizers said those arrested included Maria Cruz Ramirez, a Phoenix mother of three, and Tucson residents Narciso Valenzuela Siriaco and Jose Francisco Rincon Cautino, both of whom are said to currently face deportation.

“Many of them live in risk every day,” said Jacinta Gonzalez, lead organizer for the Congress of Day Laborers, who was on hand in support of Wednesday’s protest.

She called on President Barack Obama to “do the right thing” and take executive action to stop deportations.

An immigration reform bill is currently stalled in the House and immigrants cannot wait for Congress to act, Gonzalez said. She noted that one of the protesters has a friend who was deported last week, even though he is also a sole provider for his citizen daughters.

“We will not permit the president to be a bystander and we ask him to take action now,” she said.

But Ira Mehlman, of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, said the president does not have the authority to stop deportations, and it would be unconstitutional for him to do so.

Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration-policy analyst at the Cato Institute, said the president has very limited power to halt deportations. Even if he could, Nowrasteh said, the call might fall on deaf ears.

“The Obama administration since 2008 has massively expanded the deportation apparatus of the U.S. government and has presided over some of the largest recorded deportation rates in U.S. history,” Nowrasteh said.

But that is exactly why protesters targeted Obama. Fernando Lopez, a former Arizona resident, criticized the president for having a record of deportations higher than that of any other administration.

Lopez said he was held in Arizona detention center for a month because he was stopped and did not have an ID, and that he is now facing deportation.

“I know what it is to be in detention center, I know what it is to be racially profiled, I know what it is every time you go out you are not sure if you could come back to your house by the end of the day,” he said.

Organizers of Wednesday’s event said they are also calling for a national “convergence” in Phoenix in mid-October to include meetings, leadership training, workshops and more protests.

“People will come from the across the country to have conversations on how to stop deportations, and continue to shut down ICE (Immigration and Customers Enforcement) offices to make sure there are no more deportations in the community,” Lopez predicted.

“We have to act, and we will do everything we could, because nobody else is going to do it,” he said.