

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sept 8, 2020

Contact:

Allison Vo, VietRISE, allison@vietrise.org

Rhenie Dalger, FANM, rdalger@fanm.org

Armando Carmona, CARECEN-LA, armando@tzunu.com

Sun Bujri, SEAC Village, sun@seacvillage.org

REFUGEE COMMUNITIES CALL OUT NEW HEAD OF ICE: BRING HUMAN RIGHTS HOME!

“Pham you’re not family!”

From Little Saigon, CA, to Miami, FL, to Washington, DC, and outside of his home in Richmond, VA, ICE director Tony Pham denounced by refugee communities

Little Saigon, Orange County, CA; Los Angeles, CA; Miami, FL; and Washington, DC -- Throughout the day on Tuesday, incoming ICE Director Tony Pham was denounced by refugee communities from across the country. Beginning on Tuesday morning, refugee communities from various cities sent a unified message - online and at ICE headquarters - delivering a statement signed by two dozen organizations representing communities living across the United States -- from Little Saigon, CA, to Miami, Florida. On the same day, a coalition of grassroots groups from across North Carolina and Virginia protested at Pham’s home in Richmond, VA.

In the unity statement delivered on Tuesday morning, groups condemned Trump’s appointment as a racist maneuver and demanded Pham “bring human rights home” to address ICE’s myriad of human rights violations.

“When we say Bring Human Rights Home for migrants and refugees, we mean human rights for every person impacted by incarceration, every individual, every young person, every person separated from their families. Mr. Pham must answer for the multitude of human rights violations by ICE,” said Tracy La, Executive Director of **VietRISE**, located in the center of the largest Vietnamese community in the United States, known as Little Saigon, in Orange County, California.

As soon as the digital press conference ended, a delegation delivered the statement, signed by over two dozen refugee organizations to ICE headquarters. **Watch [footage of the event on Wednesday morning](#), as refugee communities demanded to speak with Tony Pham at ICE headquarters in DC.**

“Everyday I hear stories about children being stressed, terrified, traumatized about being separated from their mothers and fathers, about ICE’s migrant prison camps, that is the legacy that Tony Pham is representing today. In our diverse, beautiful communities in and around Miami, these refugee families are welcome, ICE is not,” said Louikencia Jean Doriscan, Community Organizer at **FANM**, located in the middle of the Haitian community in Miami Florida.

The statement, available [here online](#), **made clear what it means to “bring human rights home” for an agency steeped in white supremacy and xenophobia** that has deliberately dismantled US refugee protections.

“The pre-pandemic conditions at ICE detention were awful. Things have only gotten worse. And this happened under Tony Pham as top legal advisor. If he is standing behind the fact that he is a refugee, he must think about all of those unjustly detained and free them all immediately,” said Camila Alvarez, Legal Director, at **CARECEN-Los Angeles**.

On the same day, communities from North Carolina and Virginia [protested outside of Tony Pham’s house](#) denouncing him for the myriad of human rights violations committed by ICE, and for serving as a **“puppet” for a white nationalist administration**.

The groups at the protest - led by **SEAC Village, VietLead, Charlotte Uprising, SanctuaryDMV, ColectiVA, and Comunidad**, chanted in unison, “Pham you’re not family!”

“We won’t let this administration use our families, our histories to divide us,” said Vietnamese-American immigration attorney, Tin Nguyen, board member of **SEAC Village**, based in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Trump’s announcement that the [new head](#) of ICE would be Tony Pham, emphasizing his background as a refugee from Vietnam, was seen as yet another maneuver to provide cover for his white nationalist strategy of attrition targeting non-white immigrants and refugees.

“Let’s be clear, if Tony Pham tried to come to the United States today, he would be rejected by the same Trump administration he works for today,” added Nguyen.

The full statement is included below and available [here online](#) with full list of signers.

Today, we raise our voices as refugees and the descendants of refugees - from Viet Nam, Haiti, El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala; as organizations that have grown and persevered alongside refugee communities throughout the US; and as witnesses of the wretched treatment of our refugee sisters and brothers from around the world by the Trump administration, by U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and by ICE.

First, far from a sign of good will, refugee communities see the political stunt for what it really is: another divisive tactic to provide much-needed political cover for the Trump administration’s xenophobic ideology. Trump highlighting a government official’s refugee background, after years of showing nothing but contempt and hatred for refugees, is obviously incongruent. It’s a familiar political routine used by nativist politicians to divide our communities.

Second, we know representation alone does not equal justice for refugees or migrants. Pham’s refugee background does not absolve him from his most relevant work experience, serving as principal legal advisor for ICE, as the rogue agency was weaponized against undocumented

workers and Black Lives Matter protestors. During his tenure and in the midst of the pandemic, ICE's management of immigration detention centers exacerbated a public health crisis, with spikes in cases, unsanitary conditions, use of toxic chemicals against refugees and migrants, and continued deportations. As long as the Trump administration's agenda is guided by white nationalist hate groups, the nominal head of ICE will have an impossible time addressing the racism and myriad human rights violations committed in the name of "homeland security."

For these reasons, we will not allow refugees to be utilized as pawns for political gain. We denounce the terror sown by ICE in our communities, the existence of migrant prison camps, and the dismantling of asylum protections that has resulted in over 60 thousand asylum seekers blocked from even reaching their loved ones or relatives in the US. We implore Pham to truly honor his refugee background and **bring human rights home** for all immigrants and refugees today.

What does it mean to "bring human rights home"? For starters, if Pham has any loyalty left to refugee families that are living through what his own family and Vietnamese families lived through 45 years ago - he will take strong steps to protect refugees by announcing: (a.) the release of all those detained in ICE's migrant prison camps and their immediate closures, (b.) a halt to all deportations during the pandemic, (c.) work to guarantee protections for TPS and DACA holders before January 4, 2021, and (d.) an end to ICE collusion with hate groups. To do otherwise would mean turning his back on refugees and siding with the xenophobic, racist worldview that [questions our very presence](#) and seeks to make us disappear entirely from this country.

###