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COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
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***The Honorable Loretta Sanchez***  
***Border, Maritime, Global Counterterrorism Subcommittee***  
***Committee on Homeland Security***  
***Hearing on "Crossing the Border: Detention and Human Trafficking, Part I"***  
***March 15, 2007***

Opening Statement

Good morning.

Today's hearing is the first in a two part series that will examine the issues surrounding the treatment of migrants by Immigrations and Customs Enforcement. The first of the series - our hearing today - we will have two panels which will primarily focus on the issue of detention.

I would like to begin by thanking our witnesses: Mr. John Torres, Mr. Richard Seiter, Ms. Michelle Brané, Ms. Christina Fiflis, and Mr. Michael Cutler. Thank you for joining us today to discuss these important issues.

With the end of the "Catch and Release" program, the Department of Homeland Security faces a daunting challenge - how to deal with the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of migrants that have been detained in recent enforcement actions.

But the challenge is not only one of law enforcement. It is also a humanitarian challenge - our goal must be not only to detain migrants, but also to make sure that their detention is humane. At the same time, we must explore alternatives to detention that meet our law enforcement goals but may provide more humane conditions for detainees.

Recently reports have signaled that detention conditions and the treatment of detainees in administrative immigration detention have not been acceptable.

I have found these reports very disturbing and I hope that this hearing will shed some light on the situation, and lead to action points on how we can improve it.

I am particularly interested in learning more about Immigration and Customs Enforcement's standards of care and custody for detainees.

The government must maintain a high standard of care for people in its custody.

These standards need to include a guarantee for detainees to be treated humanely and access to counsel.

It is also critical that the Subcommittee gain a better understanding of how ICE and their detention contractors work together to ensure that these standards are maintained.

In addition, I am looking forward to hearing about alternatives to detention that can appropriately monitor individuals and ensure that they appear at all necessary hearings.

As a nation, we must be committed to treating detainees appropriately, with respect for their dignity as fellow human beings. It is in accordance with our laws, our traditions, and the ideals of this great country.

Recent reports indicate that we have some work to do before we achieve this. I hope this hearing helps us make progress on these issues.

I'd like to thank Ranking Member Souder for his interest in this topic; I look forward to working with him on this and other issues of importance in the future.

Thank you.