

# ‘This Cannot Happen’: Biden DHS Seeks Contractor for Migrant Detention Center at Guantánamo Bay

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*The solicitation for bids—which requires some guards who speak Spanish and Haitian Creole—comes as the administration is under fire for mass deportations of migrants, including thousands of Haitians.*

“This is an embarrassingly bad decision. Do better.”

That’s how U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.) [responded](#) Wednesday to [reporting](#) that the Biden administration, already under fire this week for its immigration policies, “is seeking a private contractor to operate a migrant detention facility at the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, with a requirement that some of the guards speak Spanish and Haitian Creole.”

Though the White House, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) did not respond to requests for comment, the revelation from *NBC News*’ Jacob Soboroff and Ken Dilanian sparked widespread condemnation.

“This cannot happen,” [tweeted](#) Erika Andiola, chief advocacy officer at the Texas-based rights group RAICES. She added a message directed at President Joe Biden: “Shame on you.”

Andiola wasn’t alone in taking aim at the president and other leaders in his administration.

The National Immigrant Justice Center [called out](#) Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris, and Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas. If *NBC*’s reporting—which is [backed up](#) by public records—is true, “then you have lost your way,” the group said.

i can't quite tell if the president is being taken for a ride, or the actions of his administration actually, somehow, reflect his views...

like what the actual fuck is this fucking shit. this is something the cheeto

proposed + we already fought to block. <https://t.co/O0IRkGu2U7>

— Kate Kizer (@KateKizer) [September 22, 2021](#)

*BuzzFeed*, in 2016, [described](#) the so-called Migrant Operations Center at the naval base as “a building reminiscent of a budget hotel on an isolated side of the base far from its commercial district and the military detention center.”

DHS’ posting says in part that the center “has a capacity of 120 people and will have an estimated daily population of 20 people, however the service provider shall be responsible to maintain on site the necessary equipment to erect temporary housing facilities for populations that exceed 120 and up to 400 migrants in a surge event.”

The contract solicitation for the facility comes as President Joe Biden [faces](#) global criticism for his administration’s [response](#) to thousands of Haitian migrants who [gathered](#) at a camp on the Texas-Mexico border in the context of its broader policies on asylum and deportation.

Soboroff and Dilanian noted that the records “provided no indication that the Biden administration is planning to transfer migrants from the southern border to Guantánamo Bay,” which has been used by previous U.S. administrations to detain asylum-seekers.

As *TIME* [detailed](#) in 2015:

In 1991, in the wake of a coup d’état in Haiti, thousands of Haitians fled by sea for the United States. In December of that year, Guantánamo Bay became the site of a refugee camp built to house those who sought asylum while the [George H.W.] Bush administration figured out what to do with them. Throughout the years that followed, the camp became home to thousands of native Cubans, too, who had also attempted to flee to the U.S. for political asylum. In the summer of 1994 alone, *TIME* [wrote](#) the following May, “more than 20,000 Haitians and 30,000 Cubans were intercepted at sea and delivered to hastily erected camps in Guantánamo.” In 1999, during conflict in the Balkans (and after the Haitian and Cuban refugees had been sent home or on to the States), the U.S. agreed to put up 20,000 new refugees at Guantanamo, but that plan ended up scrapped for being too far from their European homelands.

In a book initially published anonymously, former DHS official Miles Taylor [claimed](#) that former President Donald Trump discussed sending migrants to the U.S. naval base that is also infamously home to a torturous military prison, but it never actually happened.

Soboroff and Dilanian reported that immigrant rights advocates say the facility’s past use “was driven in part by the fact that some of the Haitians were HIV-positive.”

Wendy Young, president of the immigrant advocacy group Kids in Need of Defense, told *NBC* that the Biden administration’s potential plans are “highly concerning,” explaining that when the facility was used in the 1990s, it “proved highly deficient in terms of providing the services that migrant families and children urgently need, including legal representation.”

“Instead of defaulting to a law enforcement response grounded in deterrence, the administration should instead live up to our legal and ethical obligation to allow Haitians to apply for asylum,” Young said. “Conditions in Haiti underscore how essential that is.”

Even though Haiti is still reeling from the July assassination of former President Jovenel Moïse that was followed by a deadly earthquake and [tropical storm](#) last month, the Biden administration has [ramped up](#) deportations of Haitians in recent days under a pair of widely criticized [removal policies](#), one of which the administration is [defending](#) in court.

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*Featured image: The entrance to Camp 1 in detention camp's Camp Delta (Source: Public Domain)*

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