

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Press contact: Kathryn Johnson, AFSC
kjohnson@afsc.org (206) 898-2832

Faith Groups Call on DHS to End Use of Private Prisons

WASHINGTON, DC (August 30, 2016) In light of the U.S. Department of Justice announcement made on August 18th that the agency will phase out its use of private prisons, faith based groups called on the Department of Homeland Security to follow suit. Yesterday, DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson said that he would direct the DHS Advisory Council to study the issue and present recommendations by November 30th, but announced no further immediate action.

Representatives of the organizations, which include national Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and interfaith groups issued the following statements:

"The American Friends Service Committee welcomes the Department of Justice decision to end private prison contracts as a positive step forward towards ending mass incarceration and detention. As a Quaker organization we have long worked for prison and detention policies that recognize the dignity of every person. We know that profiting from incarceration is immoral and has created perverse incentives that contribute to the growth of both the prison and detention populations. We call on the administration to extend this decision and immediately end the private contracts the Department of Homeland Security uses to run this country's massive network of immigrant detention centers. Immigrant detention has become synonymous with rampant human rights abuses, poor conditions and profiteering. The writing is on the wall. Locking people up for profit is not something we can continue to do in good conscience. The administration should put a stop to all federal private prisons and detention centers to help end mass incarceration and detention." - **Shan Cretin, General Secretary, American Friends Service Committee**

"Church World Service applauds the Justice Department for ending its use of private prisons, and we call on the Department of Homeland Security to do the same. Private prison companies exist to profit off of the deprivation of freedom of our brothers and sisters. To line their pockets, they have lobbied for mandatory prison sentences for minor offenses, specifically targeting immigrants and communities of color. As we know from our work with asylum seekers and other immigrants who are detained, private prisons prioritize their bottom lines above basic human rights standards and have no regard for the wellbeing of the children, women, and men they imprison. I pray that Secretary Jeh Johnson follows the example of the DOJ and end all contracts with private prison companies. We also call for both DOJ and DHS to immediately stop placing individuals in local jails run by private prison companies. Private prisons have no place in our justice system, as they are innately unjust. While DOJ's announcement is welcome, there is still much work to be done to see that the word "justice" can truly apply to this nation."

- **Rev. John L. McCullough, President and CEO, Church World Service:**

“While Franciscan Action Network (FAN) welcomed the announcement that DOJ will phase out contracts with private prison corporations given evidence of appalling conditions and high costs, most federal contracts with private prison companies are with DHS for detention centers where most immigrants being held are mothers and children. FAN believes that detaining immigrant families, especially when filling the pockets of private prison companies runs contrary to both our faith principles and our country’s professed values of compassion, kindness and justice. We urge DHS to follow DOJ in ending contracts with private prison companies, and then avail itself of alternatives to detention for mothers and children.” - **Sister Marie Lucey, Director of Advocacy, Franciscan Action Network**

“The Friends Committee on National Legislation applauds the Department of Justice’s decision to phase out the use of private prisons. We urge all state and federal agencies to follow suit. Quakers across the country have asked FCNL to work to eliminate the profit motive for detention and pursue policies that end mass incarceration. Ending contracts with private prison corporations will re-focus efforts on determining smart, safe, restorative, and just policies for our criminal justice and immigration systems.” - **Diane Randall, Executive Secretary of the Friends Committee on National Legislation**

“The Department of Homeland Security’s callous practice of jailing asylum seekers will not end when private prisons stop being used, but it’s an important first step. In addition to shutting down private prisons, DHS must stop detaining immigrants and asylum seekers in local city and county jails, where conditions are just as bad if not worse. Detaining asylum seekers is almost never appropriate, and detaining children is always wrong, but jailing immigrants in facilities where they are treated like criminals is inhumane and must stop.” - **Mark Hetfield, President and CEO of HIAS**

“While an important victory for those who seek justice, the recent decision by the Department of Justice to end the use of privately-run prisons begs the question: if these private facilities have been deemed unsafe for criminals, why does the US government consider similar facilities run by the same companies to be safe for often traumatized asylum seekers and immigrants? Despite this sensible decision to stop fueling for-profit private prison companies with our tax dollars, the Department of Homeland Security still spends billions each year on unneeded and unsafe immigration detention centers. There are a number of proven alternatives to immigration detention that are more humane, safe and cost-effective that are a much better solution. If the Department of Justice can open its eyes to the problem of companies motivated primarily by profits operating our prison, the Department of Homeland Security can surely do the same when it comes to housing abused, frightened and vulnerable immigrants.” - **Linda Hartke, President and CEO, Lutheran Immigration & Refugee Service (LIRS)**

“National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) applauds the US Department of Justice for its decision to phase out the use of private prisons to house federal prisoners. This is a step in the right direction toward fair and humane treatment of people in prison. Unfortunately, private prison companies still operate two thirds of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) immigrant detention facilities, including two facilities that hold families and children. NCJW also urges the Department of Homeland Security to follow the example set by the Department of Justice and end their use of private prisons. Further, children should not be held in any detention facility, where they are at risk of abuse, isolation, and fear.” - **Nancy K. Kaufman, CEO, National Council of Jewish Women:**

“Catholic Sisters and Pope Francis voters across the country rejoiced when the Department of Justice chose to end the use of private prisons, but we know that the Department of Homeland Security must do the same. Immigrants and refugees are not criminals; and as a nation of immigrants we are called to welcome, not fear them. U.S. taxpayer dollars should not be used to line the pockets of private prison

companies and the practice should end immediately” - **Sister Simone Campbell, SSS, Executive Director, NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice**

"The closure of for-profit prisons by the Department of Justice is a step in the direction of justice, but to continue walking, the Department of Homeland Security must follow in its stead. Corporations hold a majority share of prison injustice, with 62% of all immigration detention beds. It is time for the DHS to take a stand against the immorality of for-profit imprisonment and restore human dignity to the lives of those imprisoned." - **Jim Wallis, President, Sojourners:**

“The private prison industry is a blight on the character of America’s heart and soul. It is shameful to think that we would entrust the incarceration and rehabilitation of our prisoners to those whose primary concern is for their shareholders. Unlike state and federally run facilities, who see the value in creating conditions that mitigate recidivism and reduce crime, private prisons are incentivized to make it likely that prisoners will return and their cells stay full. They pay their guards substandard wages. They sign contracts with quotas written in that require their ‘clients’ (state or federal governments) to provide them with a minimum occupancy rate. In order to fill those, governments then turn on our immigrant population and criminalize them. It came as no surprise to me that many Arizona legislators who wrote and supported SB1070 (an immigration bill so regressive and oppressive that most of its provisions were deemed unconstitutional) were also investors and shareholders in the state’s private prison industry. This is a disgrace, and now that the US Government has signaled it will no longer support private prisons for these and other reasons, the Department of Homeland Security should quickly work to cut its contracts with the private prison industry as well.” -**Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer, General Minister and President, United Church of Christ**

“The United Methodist Church has an historical faith commitment to fair and just prison policies. We rejoice with the Department of Justice at its decision to end the use of private prisons, and we call upon the Department of Homeland Security and state and local governments to enact similar standards. Restoration – rather than retribution – is the biblical basis for justice, which entails transformation, healing, and right relationship with God, self, and community. The move away from the privatization of prisons is a vital step in a journey toward a more compassionate and just criminal justice system.” - **Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, General Secretary, The United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society**

“The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) commends the Department of Justice on its decision to end the use of privately-managed prisons and urges the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to similarly halt the use of privately-administered immigration detention facilities. Our faith calls on us to welcome migrants and protect their human dignity, regardless of status. We have long advocated against the U.S. immigration detention system as it fails this moral imperative and criminalizes immigrants and asylum seekers. It is ill-advised to allow for-profit companies to run immigration detention facilities. As a thorough DHS review will show, and as non-governmental organizations have long documented, there are unacceptable levels of abuse occurring in privately-managed detention centers. Thus, we call on DHS to halt the use of these facilities. We further urge DHS to create a humane and effective enforcement policy that minimizes the use of detention generally and ceases detention of families with children and asylum seekers. The government should instead increase use of alternative to detention programs which are proven, cost effective, and respect human dignity.” - **William Canny, Executive Director, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Migration and Refugee Services**