

U.S. Moves to Deport Salvadoran Man to Uganda After Refusal of Plea Deal

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A Salvadoran man previously deported in error now faces the possibility of being sent to Uganda after rejecting a plea agreement in a human smuggling case, raising significant legal and ethical questions about U.S. immigration enforcement.

Kilmar Ábrego García, who lived in Maryland with his wife and children, was deported to El Salvador earlier this year despite a 2019 immigration judge's order barring his removal because of credible threats from gangs there. A court order later required his return to the United States; the Supreme Court did not uphold his removal. After his deportation, Abrego García was held in El Salvador's CECOT prison, where his legal team reported torture and harsh treatment before legal and public pressure secured his return to the United States in June.

Federal prosecutors offered him a plea arrangement: plead guilty to human smuggling, serve a sentence, and be deported to Costa Rica, where he would not be detained. He declined, pleading not guilty. After his refusal, Immigration and Customs Enforcement informed his attorneys he could be deported to Uganda under a new U.S. agreement allowing third-country deportations, even without ties to the destination.

His attorneys argue the threat to deport him to Uganda is coercive and retaliatory, pointing out that he had successfully challenged his wrongful deportation. They also claim that the government is attempting to pressure him into a guilty plea through the threat of removal to an unfamiliar and potentially unsafe country.

Legal proceedings are ongoing. A court ordered that ICE must provide at least 72 hours' notice before any deportation attempt, including to Uganda. Government officials maintain they are acting lawfully, citing his prior removal order and illegal entry into the United States.

The human smuggling case stems from a 2022 traffic stop in Tennessee, when authorities suspected he was transporting migrants illegally. He denies the charges and pleaded not guilty. His lawyers argue the

prosecution is vindictive and have filed motions to dismiss based on the context of his wrongful deportation and current coercion.

Advocacy groups and civil rights campaigners call the case a stark example of immigration enforcement overreach and the risks faced by individuals challenging the system. They argue using deportation threats to unrelated countries undermines due process and raises concerns about fairness and human rights.

As legal battles continue, the prospect of deportation to Uganda remains uncertain. His family and supporters emphasize the need for stronger safeguards and transparency in deportation practices, warning this case could set a troubling precedent.