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Immigrant rights groups hold vigil at Etowah Detention Center for Teka Gulema and other immigrants who have died in detention and demand ICE stop the deaths

Immigrants are dying untimely deaths in government custody, ICE must be held accountable

[GADSDEN, ALABAMA] – Día de Muertos, or Day of the Dead, is an important holiday for many in our community who celebrate the Mexican tradition of honoring friends and family members who have died. To mark that holiday, Shut Down Etowah, Detention Watch Network (DWN), faith groups, and other immigrant rights groups held a vigil at the Etowah County Detention Center on Saturday, October 28, to bring awareness to the untimely deaths of immigrants in government custody, including that of Teka Gulema, an Etowah detainee who died in January of 2016. [Recent investigations](#) into deaths in immigration detention have found that inadequate medical care at detention centers have contributed to numerous deaths.

The vigil featured formerly detained individuals who spoke about their horrific experiences while being in detention, musical performances and traditional elements of Day of the Dead, including altars in remembrance of those who have passed.

“I know first-hand the horrific conditions inside that detention center,” said Raymundo Cabrera, an activist with Shut Down Etowah. “Of the 18 months I spent in detention in this country, eight of them were in Etowah and it was by far the worst place I had ever been. We received no medical care, very little food, and no access to the outside world. These are basic human needs.”

Since 2003, 176 people have died in immigration detention. This past year alone, there have been 12 deaths in detention centers across the country at the hands of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The shameful record of deaths amassed by ICE exposes their inability to guarantee the safety and health of people in their custody. ICE allows rampant abuses, substandard medical care, and other violations to continue undetected – sometimes with fatal consequences.

“ICE is allowing people to die in their custody. We demand ICE conduct an investigation into the 22 deaths that have occurred since October 1, 2015 and publicly release the findings by December 1st,” said Danny Cendejas, DWN Organizing Director. “People are dying due to medical neglect with no accountability. The evidence is clear and indisputable; ICE needs to start shutting down detention centers now.”

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Visit www.shutdownetowah.org and www.facebook.com/ShutDownEtowah to learn more

Detention Watch Network (DWN) is a national coalition of organizations and individuals working to expose and challenge the injustices of the United States’ immigration detention and deportation system and advocate for profound change that promotes the rights and dignity of all persons. Founded in 1997 by immigrant rights groups, DWN brings together advocates to unify strategy and build partnerships on a local and national level to end immigration detention. Visit www.detentionwatchnetwork.org.