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The Toll of Trump's African Deportation Agreements

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An image shared by the White House press secretary shows a deportation flight in January. (X account of White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt)

W

ithout explanation, 62-year-old Orville Etoria and four other men were cuffed, taken from the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention center in El Paso and put on a long flight. No one told them where they were being taken. As the

plane flew over the Atlantic on July 15, Etoria realized he wasn't being repatriated

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governments, and the real human cost of the practice.

On arrival, the men were taken to Matsapha, Eswatini's maximum-security complex outside the capital Mbabane, and placed in an isolated unit. They were

imprisoned without charge or sentence for any crime. They had already completed sentences in the U.S. years ago and had been living in their respective communities under ICE supervision: working, checking in, waiting in the same legal limbo that traps thousands of noncitizens with previous convictions and long-standing removal orders. But in its drive to ramp up deportations, the

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For countries like Cuba, Laos and Vietnam, which have a history of conflict with the U.S. that makes repatriation difficult, this clause has rarely been invoked when home-country return isn't possible. People in these circumstances are

generally placed under ICE supervision, allowing them to live in the community and work, if granted authorization. This can last for years, as long as they check in with ICE for review and extension on an annual basis and follow the other conditions, like requesting permission to travel out of state. In 2025, Laos and Vietnam increased cooperation in some cases, on a limited basis, but removal

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third-country deportations to Eswatini as “a legal black hole,” essentially “human trafficking in a digital age.” It has become a way to move people beyond the reach of U.S. courts and then claim there is nothing a judge can do once they are outside the jurisdiction of the American legal system, he told *New Lines*.

“Everybody’s making money off of human bodies right now, and the only way to please the Trump administration so that you don’t get tariffs or any kind of visa sanctions is by accepting more deportees.”

The second group of 10 men was deported to Eswatini under the same

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The East African nations South Sudan and Uganda have also agreed to receive deportees, but details are murky. Officials have not disclosed how many have

arrived or from where. Meanwhile, several African governments, among them Burkina Faso, Libya and Nigeria, have refused to sign such deals altogether.

Together, these quiet transfers reveal a widening network of deals stretching across Africa, where countries with no connection to the deportees are being

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described as ludicrous. "What can you do in six hours to prevent deportation to a third country?" he asked.

For Ramji-Nogales, the bottom line as regards due process is simple: notice and a chance to be heard about the specific third country before any transfer. “None of these people elected Eswatini, there’s been no opportunity for them to contest and they don’t know where they are going,” she said.

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from prison. The governments of the United States and Eswatini must take responsibility for the real human consequences of their deal.” she said. In a statement addressing Mosquera’s “alleged hunger strike,” Mdluli, the Eswatini government spokesperson, said he was “in good health and spirits” and “that he

did mention that he was currently fasting and praying because he was missing his family.”

A close family friend of Mosquera in Miami, who asked to be called “Ada” for fear of reprisals, told *New Lines* that she’d spoken to him after he began his hunger

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represents men from the first and second cohorts. For some, nationality is disputed or undetermined; others simply cannot safely return. “There are going

to be those who can't or won't [be returned to their home countries]. Are they stuck? Do they go somewhere else? Why are they in prison?" David asked.

The IOM, for its part, has distanced itself from removals while acknowledging its limited role following arrival: "IOM does not support or facilitate deportations." It

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Makhubu told *New Lines*, "America is betraying everything that gives hope to mankind."

After spending more than two months in prison in Eswatini, Etoria was repatriated to Jamaica on Sept. 22 – the only deportee to make it out of Eswatini so far. Unger, his lawyer, points to the domestic law that should have led to a different outcome for her client. He “could have only been sent to a country other than Jamaica if deportation to Jamaica was impracticable, inadvisable or impossible.”

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could be expanded to other categories of people in the U.S. And to get the public to buy into the practice, or at least shrug and look the other way, the administration is portraying the deportees as “barbaric people with crazy convictions,” he said, rather than free men who have long ago completed

sentences for their offenses, now indefinitely incarcerated without charges. The danger, he warned, is “more and more erosion of our rights.”

The eventual scope of this program, if it continues unchanged, remains undefined

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