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ICE DEPORTS MAN CLAIMING U.S. CITIZENSHIP TO LAOS DESPITE FEDERAL COURT ORDER

ICE Deports Man Claiming U.S. Citizenship to Laos Despite Federal Court Order

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Chanthila Souvannarath Unlawfully Removed After Being Detained at Angola's ICE Facility

BATON ROUGE – In a stunning violation of a federal court order, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has deported Chanthila Souvannarath, to Laos. Mr. Souvannarath, who has claims to American citizenship for over 20 years, is now detained in a foreign country despite a federal court ruling that recognized his substantial claim to citizenship and prohibited his removal.

On October 23, Chief Judge Shelly D. Dick of the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Louisiana issued a temporary restraining order explicitly prohibiting ICE from removing Souvannarath from the United States. ICE deported him anyway.

"ICE just ignored a federal court order and tore yet another family apart," said Alanah Odoms, executive director for the ACLU of Louisiana. "This is the deportation of someone who has strong claims to American citizenship. This administration has shown it will ignore the courts, ignore the Constitution and ignore the law to pursue its mass deportation agenda, even if it means destroying the lives of American citizens."

Souvannarath was born in a refugee camp in Thailand and entered the United States before his first birthday, receiving lawful permanent residence. He became a U.S. citizen as a minor when his father naturalized and gained sole custody of him, meeting all requirements for derivative citizenship under immigration law at the time.

Despite his citizenship, ICE detained Souvannarath on June 18, 2025, and held him at the notorious [Camp 57](#) detention facility inside Angola prison, Louisiana's former slave plantation turned maximum-security prison. From detention, Souvannarath, representing himself, filed a habeas petition with the federal court seeking recognition of his citizenship and immediate release.

"This should shock the nation," said Nora Ahmed, legal director of the ACLU of Louisiana. "The deportation of an individual with a substantial claim to U.S. citizenship represents a catastrophic failure of the immigration system and a flagrant violation of constitutional rights. It raises urgent questions about just how many other people, potentially including other U.S. citizens, have been wrongfully deported because our immigration system does not require legal representation of individuals placed behind bars at jails masquerading as 'immigration detention centers.'"

"ICE defied a federal court order by deporting Chanthila on Friday," said Bridget Pranzatelli, Staff Attorney at the National Immigration Project. "This should alarm everyone. Federal agencies cannot simply ignore the other branches of government. ICE—like every other federal and state enforcement agency—is bound by the orders of the court. We call for the immediate return of Mr. Souvannarath and for ICE to be held accountable for his flagrantly illegal removal."

"Mr. Souvannarath's case isn't just about the federal government ignoring a court order," said Sarah Gillman, Director of Strategic U.S. Litigation at Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. "It's about a chaotic system of mass detention that subjects people to abuse behind bars

and unjust deportation. This is what happens when you disappear people to notorious, isolated prisons under the guise of 'civil' detention - you end up wrongfully deporting individuals who have pending federal litigation involving their claims to U.S. citizenship."

The ACLU of Louisiana, along with its partners at RFK Human Rights and the National Immigration Project, are exploring all legal options to secure Souvannarath's immediate return to the United States and hold ICE accountable.

About the ACLU of Louisiana:

The ACLU of Louisiana leads the charge to protect the civil rights and liberties of Louisianians, especially those most marginalized and historically harmed. True to our founding during the Civil Rights Movement, we are fearless in the face of intimidation and fight tirelessly to protect and empower Louisiana's Black, Brown, Immigrant, and LGBTQ+ communities. We are part of a nationwide network of affiliates working in courts, legislatures, and communities in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and Washington, D.C.

About the National Immigration Project:

The [National Immigration Project](#) is a membership organization of attorneys, advocates, and community members who believe that all people should be treated with dignity, live freely, and flourish. We litigate, advocate, educate, and build bridges across movements to ensure that those most impacted by the immigration and criminal systems are uplifted and supported. Learn more at nipnlg.org. Follow the National Immigration Project on Bluesky, Facebook, Twitter/X, and Instagram at [@NIPNLG](#).

About Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights:

[Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights](#) is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that has worked to realize Robert F. Kennedy's dream of a more just and peaceful world since 1968. In partnership with local activists, we advocate for key human rights issues—championing change makers and pursuing strategic litigation at home and around the world. And to ensure change that lasts, we foster a social-good approach to business and investment and educate millions of students about human rights and social justice.

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