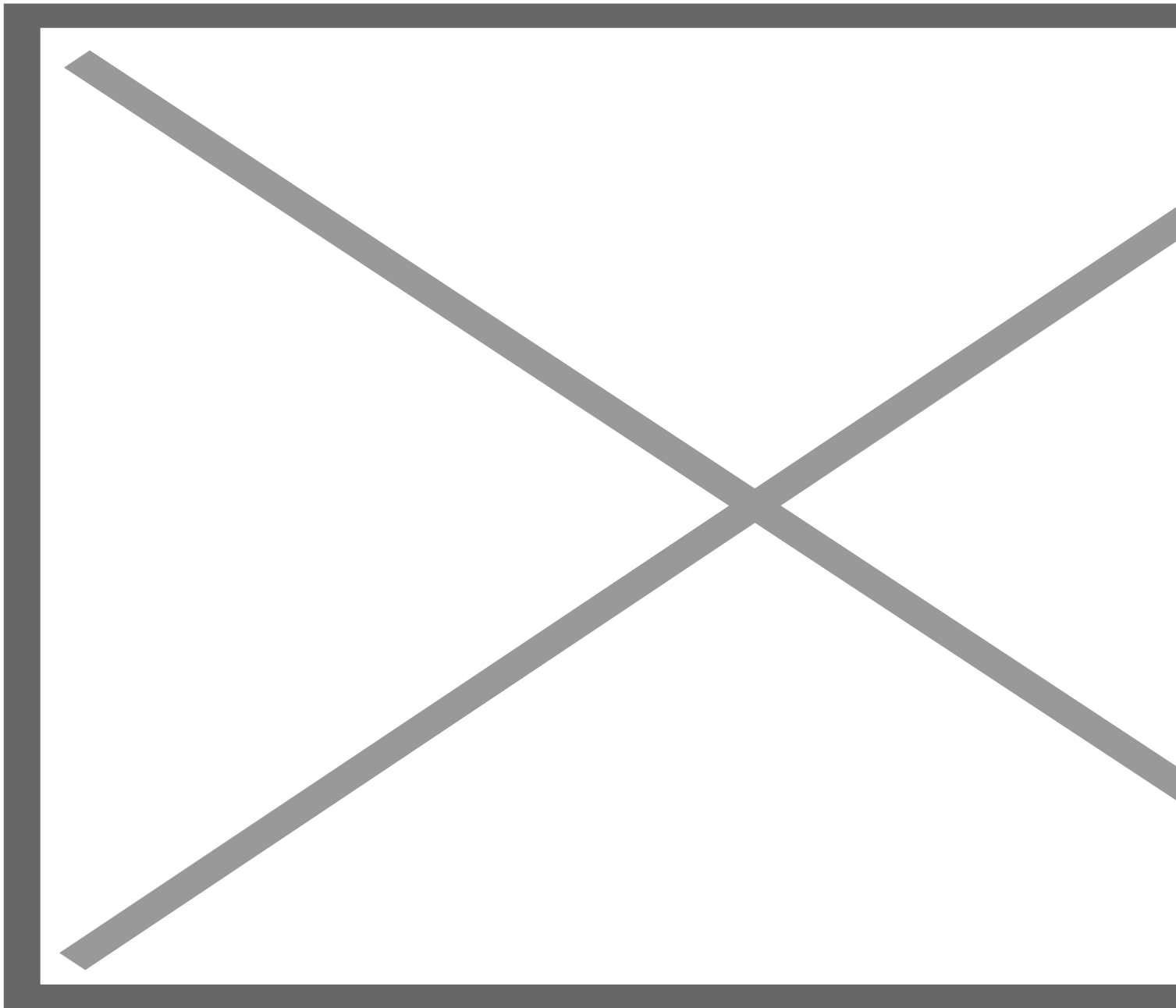


Clergy rally to defend Kilmar Abrego García as he is detained by ICE

by [Jack Jenkins](#)

August 26, 2025



Kilmar Abrego García enters the Immigration and Customs Enforcement field office in Baltimore, August 15.
(RNS photo/Jack Jenkins)

Before being taken into custody by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents Monday morning, Kilmar Abrego García, the Maryland man who became a national flashpoint after he was illegally deported to El Salvador by the Trump administration, addressed a crowd gathered at ICE's Baltimore field office in Spanish.

Addressing other immigrants, he said, “God is with us, and God will never leave us.”

Abrego then added: “God will bring justice to all of the injustice that we are suffering.”

As he finished speaking, clergy from an array of religious traditions joined with US Rep. Glen Ivey, of Maryland, to lay hands on Abrego, who bowed his head as the group prayed over him and a rabbi blew a shofar.

Abrego then slowly ascended the steps of the building to attend a required check-in with immigration authorities ahead of his upcoming trial on human smuggling charges, to which he has pleaded not guilty. As he pushed through a throng of reporters and entered the revolving doors, the crowd chanted “Sí, se puede!”—“Yes, we can!”

Then, in view of photographers who pressed their cameras against the windows outside, Abrego huddled one last time with his family and closest supporters. As they stood quietly, they joined in what protest organizers later said was a prayer.

Behind him on the steps, faith leaders led the crowd in singing hymns. Among them was “This Little Light of Mine,” but attendees added a new verse: “Kilmar is our neighbor, you can’t have him Trump. Leave him be, leave him be, leave him be.”

Less than an hour later, Abrego’s lawyer, Simon Sandoval-Moshenberg, informed the crowd that his client had been taken into ICE custody. Suddenly, the singing shifted into a chant of “Shame! Shame! Shame!”

The emotional, and often deeply religious, event was equal parts protest rally and vigil, with clergy and faith leaders speaking alongside union leaders and elected officials as they voiced their outrage over the administration’s treatment of Abrego and immigrants in general.

The faith presence at the rally testified to a growing religious pushback to Trump’s immigration policies. On Trump’s first day in office, Bishop Mariann Budde, the Episcopal bishop of Washington, asked the president in her Inauguration Day [sermon](#) to have mercy on migrants. Since then, clergy have [staged](#) protests against his immigration policies, even [confronting](#) masked [federal agents](#) as they have detained immigrants.

The demonstration opened with a prayer from Baptist Pastor Julio Hernandez, who leads the Congregation Action Network, which helped organize the event. “We cry today to you, oh Lord, to set Kilmar free, set this family free from oppression, and save Jennifer and his children from injustice,” he said, his prayer translated into English and Spanish. “Repent and be free, those who live to oppress and to know the power of God.”

While leading the laying on of hands for Abrego and his family, Rabbi Ariana Katz said, “As you are caught in the gnashing teeth of fascism and cruelty, as lies are shouted about who you are and who your family is, as betrayals are whispered to you, claiming that you are alone, know that you walk in truth, know you are never alone. You and your family are encircled under the wings of the Holy One.”

Signs sprinkled throughout the crowd were emblazoned with slogans such as “Jews against ICE,” “Jesus was a refugee” and “May God have mercy on ICE.” Others cited scripture passages from the Gospel of Matthew and the Book of Deuteronomy: “You shall love the stranger for you were strangers.”

Abrego, in his address, recalled the joy he felt upon reuniting with his own family last week after being returned to the US from El Salvador’s infamous CECOT prison.

After Abrego entered the building, the vigil continued with a litany of religious speakers from Methodist, Episcopalian, Baptist, Catholic, Jewish, Buddhist, and Unitarian Universalist traditions, among others.

Ty Hollinger, a Catholic priest, cited Jesus' call to welcome the stranger. "For Catholics as a people of faith, when we see our sisters and our brothers like Kilmar not being treated with fundamental human dignity, fundamental human rights, the right to due process, we know that that's an attack on the dignity of us all," he said.

Hollinger later explained his presence at the rally by connecting his support for immigrant rights as a requirement of his faith. "The founder of my faith was a poor person born into a poor family who were migrants themselves, and who were homeless," he said. "If that doesn't inspire us as people of faith to first be with people that are experiencing homelessness, migration issues, poverty today, then I don't know what our faith means."

"I believe that God's heart is breaking, my heart is breaking, and I take hope in the words of my faith and the words that Kilmar told us before he went in today. He said, 'Whatever happens today, I will have hope,'" said in an interview. "He told us to continue to resist, continue to fight and continue to love. So I will hold on to that."

Sandoval-Moshenberg told the crowd outside the ICE field office that his firm has already filed another lawsuit in Abrego's long legal battle. This time, the attorneys are challenging his detention and potential deportation to Uganda, where the administration has [reportedly](#) threatened to take him.

"We asked the ICE officer what the reason for his detention was. The ICE officer didn't answer," the lawyer said. "The ICE officer stated that he'll be taken to the detention center. We asked the ICE officer which detention center, the ICE officer said that they weren't able to say. We asked the ICE officer for a copy of any paperwork that's being served on him. Today, the ICE officer wouldn't commit to even giving us that paperwork."

Sandoval-Moshenberg and the rest of Abrego's legal team argue that the administration is using the threat of deportation to Uganda as a way to pressure him to plead guilty in return for being deported to Costa Rica, where Abrego has said he would accept refugee status.

"The fact that they're holding Costa Rica as a carrot and using Uganda as a stick to coerce him is such clear evidence that they're weaponizing the immigration system in a manner that is completely unconstitutional," Sandoval-Moshenberg said.

Even so, faith leaders who spoke to the media said they will continue to advocate on Abrego's behalf, with many citing his own words to the crowd shortly before he was detained.

"Regardless of what happens today with ICE, promise me this," Abrego said in Spanish, "that you will keep fighting, praying, believing in dignity and liberty, not just for me but for all." —Religion News Service