



Kilmar Ábrego García, center, stands before a crowd of supporters at Baltimore's federal office building before his appointment with Immigration and Customs Enforcement on Aug. 25. Standing next to him is his wife, Jennifer Vasquez Sura. A short time later, Ábrego García was taken into custody. (Patricia Zapor)



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Religious leaders gathered to pray and join activists, protesters and politicians outside of Immigration and Customs Enforcement offices for Maryland on Monday morning, Aug. 25, as Kilmar Ábrego García was once again in federal custody.

Moments before word came that Ábrego García was taken into custody, Catholic Fr. Ty Hullinger said he joined the vigil because he believes the faithful need to become more active. "We know what to do," Hullinger said. "We know how to do it. We need the courage to take action. This is not going to stop here."

Ábrego García's detention was the latest development for the Salvadoran immigrant from Maryland whose saga has become a global touchpoint. Ábrego García's surrender to authorities comes after the 30-year-old spent a weekend reunited with his family and made brief remarks to supporters at a prayer vigil on Monday.

He spoke to a crowd gathered outside Baltimore's George Fallon Federal Office Building, where Immigration and Customs Enforcement has its Maryland offices.

"These moments will continue to give me hope," Abrego said. "To all those families who have been separated or threatened with family separation, I want to tell you something. God is with us. God will never leave us. God will bring justice to all the injustice we are suffering."

Rallying chants echoed across the plaza before Ábrego García joined the gathering:

"This is what democracy looks like."

"*Sí, se puede*. Yes, we can."

"*Todos somos Kilmar*." ("We are all Kilmar.")



Participants at an Aug. 25 rally in Baltimore for Kilmar Ábrego García raise fists opposing harsh treatment of immigrants. (Patricia Zapor)

Prayers and words of encouragement for Ábrego García and other immigrants were offered by religious leaders of several denominations, including the Rev. Julio Hernandez, a Baptist pastor who is executive director of the Congregation Action Network. Hernandez offered a prayer based on Isaiah 1, which speaks of learning to do right, defend the oppressed and seek justice.

Rabbi Ariana Katz, a Reconstructionist rabbi who founded the Hinenu Baltimore congregation, led a prayer that included blowing a shofar, a ram's horn used in Jewish rituals.

Other speakers included Jaime Contreras of the SEIU labor organization. He noted that Ábrego García is a union member. "What they are doing is shameful, to say the least," Contreras said.

Maryland Democratic Rep. Glenn Ivey said, "It's hard to believe we're still here."

Ivey, who before entering Congress had worked at the Justice Department as an assistant U.S. attorney, said that "when we made mistakes we fixed them and moved on." In Ábrego García's case, "they keep fighting it."

Ábrego García's detention came as he checked in with ICE, as ordered when he was released with an ankle monitor days earlier, on Aug. 22, by U.S. marshals. He had been held in Tennessee pending court review of a criminal case against him.

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His attorney, Simon Sandoval-Moshenberg, reported within half an hour of Ábrego García's 8 a.m. appointment that he had been taken into custody.

No further information was given to him about where Ábrego García would be detained and what would happen to him next, Sandoval-Moshenberg said. Maryland does not have a facility for detaining immigrants. The federal building has only a couple of holding areas.

"The only reason he was taken into detention was to punish him for exercising his constitutional rights," the attorney said. Ábrego García's legal team promptly filed a new lawsuit seeking "to ensure he is not removed from the United States pending full immigration procedures."

Ábrego García was picked up outside an Ikea store in Maryland in March and quickly sent to a prison in El Salvador that is notorious for its harsh treatment.

The Justice Department in a court filing admitted it was a mistake to send him to El Salvador because a court had forbidden it due to the risks to him. After months of claiming it could not get him released, the administration brought Ábrego García to Tennessee in June and charged him with human smuggling, stemming from a 2022 traffic stop for speeding. In that case he had been allowed to continue his journey, with no charges.



Police look out at people who gathered in front of the Baltimore federal building where Kilmar Ábrego García had an interview appointment with Immigration and Customs Enforcement and was taken into custody Aug. 25. (Patricia Zapor)

The Rev. Vidal Rivas, senior priest at St. Matthew Episcopal Church in Hyattsville, Maryland, said he was there to support Ábrego García as a fellow Salvadoran. "The law needs to be sensitive and just," he said. "If there is no justice, there is no love."

Hullinger, the Catholic priest from the Baltimore Archdiocese, told the National Catholic Reporter that he regularly attends events to support immigrants and labor rights. He said it is frustrating that more people of faith are not stepping up to oppose the government's treatment of immigrants.

Now in residence at Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish in Middle River, Maryland, Hullinger said Scripture and church teaching are clear in calling for protection of those who are being oppressed.

Speaking to the crowd moments later, Hullinger continued that train of thought. "The Catholic faith teaches that how you treat the stranger among us is a barometer

for who we are as a people."