News

Protesters flank an entrance road at a temporary migrant detention center nicknamed "Alliga

Protesters flank an entrance road at a temporary migrant detention center nicknamed "Alligator Alcatraz" in Ochopee, Fla., July 1, the day U.S. President Donald Trump visited the facility. (OSV News/Reuters/Octavio Jones)

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A recent immigration enforcement raid involving Korean workers in Georgia has rattled the Savannah area's Korean Catholics, according to one spokesman for the community.

More than 300 Korean nationals were among the 475 detained as part of a Sept. 4 sweep by Immigrations and Customs Enforcement officials at a Hyundai manufacturing complex in Ellabell, Georgia.

At a Sept. 5 news conference, Steven Schrank — the special agent in charge of Homeland Security Investigations in Georgia — said the raid capped a lengthy investigation regarding illegal hiring by the plant. He touted the takedown as the "largest single site enforcement operation" in HSI's history.

The Guardian, citing a leaked internal federal document it had obtained, found that "at least one of the Korean workers" seized during the raise "was living and legally working in the U.S."

However, said the outlet, "officials then 'mandated' that he agree to be removed from the U.S. despite not having violated his visa."

The detainees arrived back in South Korea Sept. 12, with CNN reporting that one mother of a detainee — identified for her safety only by her surname, Park — had been unable to reach her son during his confinement.

The raid, which targeted a plant seen as a prime bilateral business opportunity, has threatened to strain U.S.-South Korea relations — but for Korean Catholics around Savannah, the damage is far more than economic.

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"The Korean Catholic community in the Savannah has been deeply affected" by the raid, said a spokesperson for the community, who requested anonymity after initially providing a full name, fearing retribution from immigration authorities despite having lawful immigration status in the U.S.

"Many in our community feel confused and distressed by this event," said the spokesperson. "As people of faith, we will continue to pray for the safety and well-being of those impacted — in mind, body and spirit — and we hope that they may find peace and stability, whether here or in their home countries."

In a statement provided to OSV News, Bishop Stephen Parkes of Savannah pointed to his recent "Call to Prayer," through which faithful are invited to offer up "one Hail Mary each day for the members of our human family who are suffering with pain, challenges, or a loss of hope."

"It is my prayer that all involved in the incident in Ellabell are treated with respect and afforded the dignity inherent in them as children of Almighty God," said Parkes, adding in his statement — which preceded the detainees' deportation to South Korea — that he asked "those responsible for the detainees to ensure that their living conditions are appropriate, and that their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs are recognized and met."

This story appears in the **Immigration and the Church** feature series. View the full series.