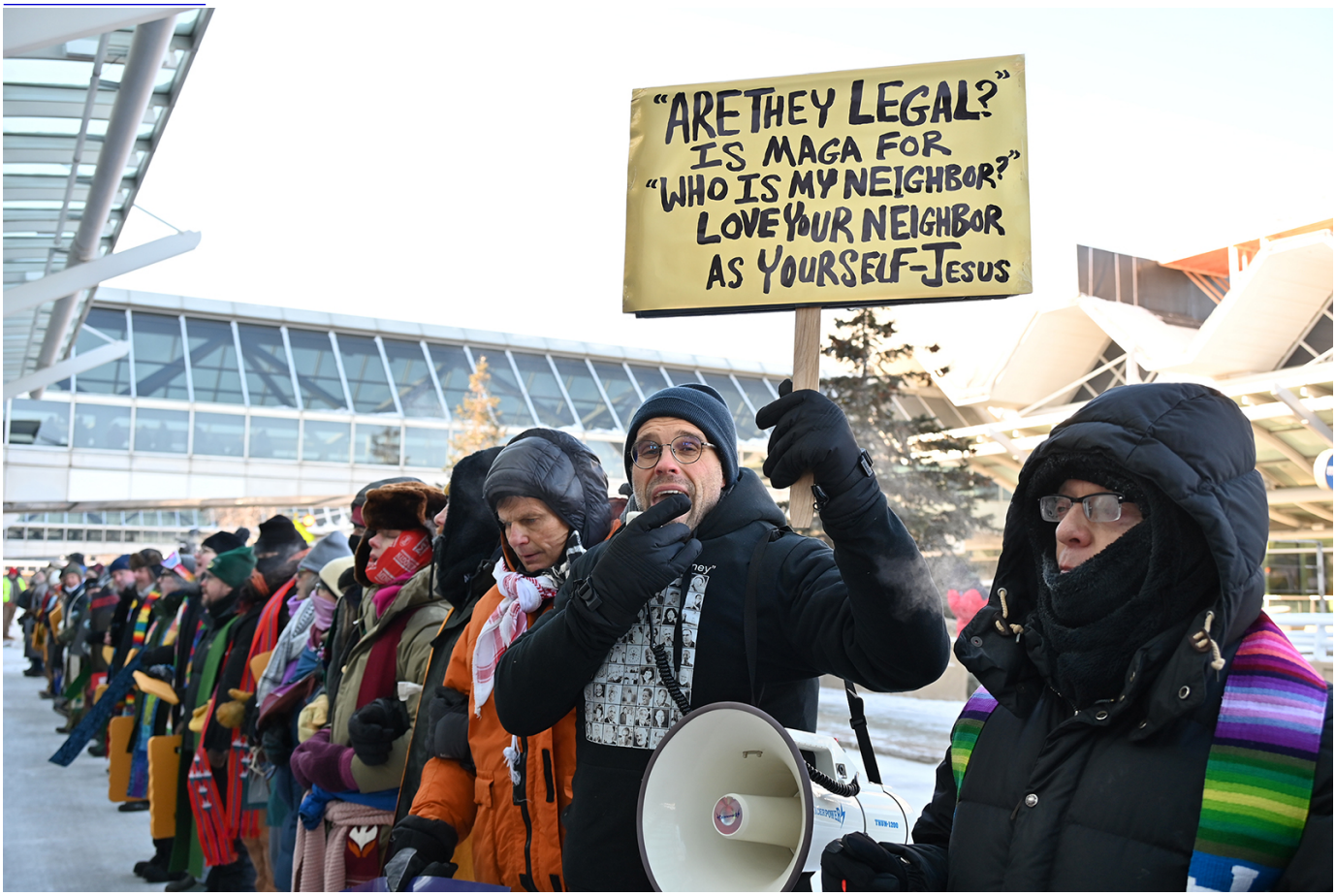
Opinion

Guest Voices



Faith leaders demonstrate against U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement tactics, in the departures area of Terminal 1 of the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, Friday, Jan. 23, 2026, in St. Paul, Minn. (RNS/Jack Jenkins)

Sunita Viswanath

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Minneapolis — January 26, 2026
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I arrived in Minneapolis on Wednesday (Jan. 21). I had come because local organizers said people were being disappeared: kidnapped off the street, detained, shot in plain daylight. I went because there was a cry for help from a devastated community.

Nothing prepared me for what I saw. The city was a battleground where U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement feels like an occupying force.

A Hindu organizer and activist, I went as an ally of a 50-strong Rabbis for Ceasefire delegation, some of whom I knew from our trip to Israel and the Palestinian territories in August, to see the effects of the Gaza war. I saw there firsthand what occupation looks like. Minneapolis felt occupied, too.

The people of Minneapolis are responding and resisting in unspeakably brave, radically loving ways that we will speak of for years to come.

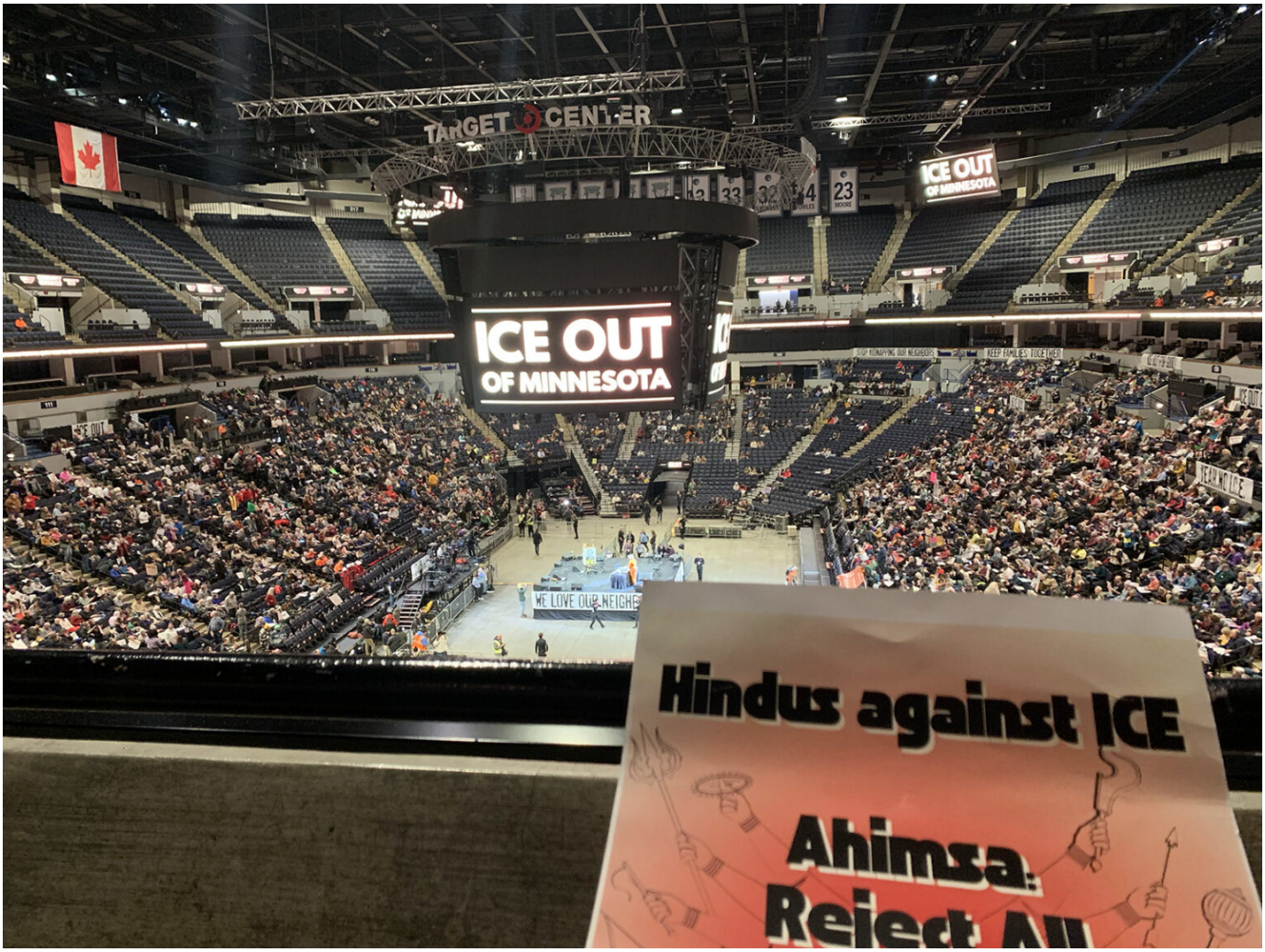
Our first stop was a "convergence" of faith leaders, organized by a long-standing local coalition, MARCH (Multifaith Antiracism, Change and Healing). After two days of education, training in nonviolent resistance and immersion into this moment in Minneapolis, MARCH had one ask: Go back to our communities and share what we witnessed.

On Friday we participated in Minneapolis' citywide day of action, a general strike, for which hundreds of local businesses chose to close. Some gave free food and drink to people participating. Tens of thousands of people — faith leaders among them — marched to abolish ICE in spite of frigid temperatures. The march culminated in a huge rally in an indoor stadium, where local faith leaders, union leaders and elected officials offered speeches and prayers of defiance and resilience.

Within that larger strike, our faith convergence took part in actions of defiance organized by MARCH. At Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, some 100 clergy were arrested, while an estimated 600 local community members and out-of-town

clergy stood witness. Later, I joined a group of multifaith clergy in song, prayer and presence at the B.H. Whipple Federal Building, where Minnesota's ICE offices are headquartered. More a sprawling compound than a single building, it was an ugly, stomach-turning place: streams of protesters, anti-ICE graffiti and the heavy feeling of power concentrated behind concrete walls.

After praying there, we did what many local residents do when they aren't working or caring for their families: patrol the streets. This is what Renee Nicole Good and Alex Pretti, both Minnesota residents shot to death by ICE agents, were doing when they were killed.



Thousands of people attend a rally at the Target Center after a large march on Friday, Jan. 23, 2026, in Minneapolis. (Courtesy of Hindus for Human Rights)

We drove for hours in the car of a local friend, Bonnie, watching her communicate with "dispatch" — a volunteer who takes in reports of ICE activity and sends people to witness and protest. From 5 a.m. to midnight every day, locals drive the streets, communicating with dispatch, watching for ICE vehicles and activity, documenting license plates and recording what they see. In just three hours, dispatch never went quiet. There were three abductions during that short time.

We saw ICE agents and vehicles across the city, and almost always a group of residents nearby: shouting, shaming, filming. We got out of the car several times to join them. Once, agents were harassing someone in a car some 50 yards away and one deployed tear gas. Instantly, our eyes burned, our throats constricted and we struggled to breathe. We rushed back to our car. Our friend, who had stayed inside, felt the effects just from our clothes and skin.

Back in India, my aunt would tell me that a pilgrimage had to be hard. You had to suffer. She took me to small street temples where you walked barefoot on ice to access the shrine. Our main family deity is worshipped in a famous temple atop a huge hill, and we would often walk up the hill rather than drive. When my aunt was in crisis and her prayer felt like a weight, she would do pradakshinas, circumambulating the shrine by rolling on the ground.

The moments of not being able to breathe, while thankfully brief, felt like the hardship that made this a pilgrimage. And Minneapolis, for me, a holy place.

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I was devastated throughout my days in the city, but the only time I was personally frightened was when someone threw a snowball — an iceball, in the below-freezing temperatures that week — at an ICE agent. He turned in anger, scanning for the culprit, looking like he could have done anything. When he turned away, I tried to breathe a sigh of relief and remembered I was still choking.

Every Minnesotan I met thanked us for coming so far to stand with them, and many expressed solidarity with us, because they believe this wave of cruelty, hate and madness is coming for us all, no matter where in the country we live.

That conviction showed up everywhere, in small human moments and in harder truths. One Somali cab driver was so amazed someone would travel from New York to stand with his city that he wanted to buy me coffee. (He couldn't waive the cab fee because it was a Lyft.) The Somali cabbie who drove me to the airport at 4:30 a.m. was irate. "What is wrong with Americans? Do they want this?" he ranted. "Why did they vote for this? What is so special about Trump that he isn't behind bars? When will this end? What kind of democracy allows this?"

Bonnie, who drove us for hours to show us what patrol is like, told us she's in therapy for post-traumatic stress disorder after a group of heavily armed ICE agents pointed their guns at her at an intersection near where Renee Good was killed. She continues to patrol every day because, as a person of relative privilege, she feels "responsible." Another friend, a Minnesota local who traveled with me to Palestine, chauffeurs a group of immigrant kids to school, kids whose parents are terrified to leave their house.

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At the convergence, one speaker insisted she wasn't an activist. She was simply a neighbor worried about an immigrant family across the street. That concern helped create a mutual-aid network, one of many in Minneapolis. Participants donate money and resources so that people in need can pay rent, buy groceries and access health care. She said $300,000 had already passed through her network. "If someone gives, take it. If someone needs, give it. If you have space, share it."

Since people in Minneapolis believe the hell they are facing is bound for all our hometowns, they kept offering not just grief but guidance, whatever they think will get the rest of us through when our time comes.

Over and over, I heard the same imperatives: Unite across differences, especially ideological differences, and join hands to resist an authoritarian takeover. Give freely, share what we have, and do what we can to keep each other safe. Act now,

because there isn't time for long, drawn-out planning. And know this is coming for you. Don't assume it's someone else's problem.

They also kept insisting that we learn history — not as an academic exercise, but as a survival skill. Whether it is the genocide of Indigenous people or the catastrophic history of slavery and Jim Crow, the history of this country leads us here. Throughout our history, only mass uprisings have brought change. We have to take strategic inspiration from the nonviolent civil disobedience of the Civil Rights Movement.

They were blunt about what that demands: Resistance cannot be symbolic. Acts of resistance must go beyond symbolism into non-cooperation. Protest cannot be law-abiding when there is no law and order.

Tonight I will close my eyes in a safe, cozy home back in New York. But Minneapolis taught me we are in an emergency beyond comprehension. We may be afraid — how could we not be? — but fear has to propel us, not paralyze us. Fear lessens when we unite with many, and when we ground every action and decision in unconditional kindness: love. We need to get uncomfortable, share every resource we have, risk danger, make the crisis our house of worship, and pilgrimage there to pray with our feet.

This story appears in the **Immigration Protests in Minneapolis** feature series. View the full series.