

National Press Club Press Freedom Award Winner Narrowly Avoids Deportation Mexican journalist Emilio Gutierrez now in detention in El Paso

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 7 – National Press Club Press Freedom award winner Emilio Gutierrez was within minutes of being returned to Mexico, a country he fled nearly a decade ago in fear of his life, when the U.S. Board of Immigration Appeals issued a stay of his deportation on Thursday.

The Mexican journalist is now at a detention camp in El Paso, said his attorney, Eduardo Beckett. The lawyer accompanied Gutierrez and his son to the facility earlier in the day for a scheduled appointment. He said that armed guards met Gutierrez.

“They handcuffed him and said, ‘We are going to remove him now,’” Beckett said. Despite the lawyer’s protests, Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials refused to wait for the Board of Immigration Appeals to rule on Beckett’s telephoned appeal. “They said, ‘We don’t have to wait. We’re taking him now,’” Beckett recounted.

Ten minutes later, Beckett said, he got a call back from the Board of Immigration Appeals issuing the stay and was able to recall the agents. But he reported that Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials are refusing to release Gutierrez and his 24-year-old son. “They said, ‘We’re detaining him,’” Beckett said. “I think they are being vindictive.”

Contacted by the National Press Club, a spokesperson for Immigration and Customs Enforcement said the agency is “researching the case” and will have no official statement until that process is completed.

“We salute the Bureau of Immigration Appeals for acting quickly to prevent this Dec. 7 from becoming another day that lives in infamy,” said National Press Club President Jeff Ballou. “Failing to do so could have been tantamount to allowing an immigration judge to issue a death sentence.”

Mexico is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists. Earlier this week, the United Nations [issued a report](#) decrying a “crisis of safety” for reporters working there and criticizing the Mexican government for failing to keep them safe. According to Gutierrez, it was Mexican military authorities — whose alleged abuses against civilians he had been reporting — who were threatening him.

Nonetheless, Robert Hough, an immigration judge in El Paso, earlier this year [denied Gutierrez’s request for asylum](#), saying there is no reason to believe the Mexican government would not protect the reporter and questioning Gutierrez’s journalistic credentials. Gutierrez has appealed Hough’s order.

In October, the National Press Club invited Gutierrez to accept the John Aubuchon Press Freedom Award on behalf of Mexico's journalists. Nearly two dozen journalism and press freedom organizations [have signed a letter](#) supporting Gutierrez's asylum request.

This marks the second time this year that U.S. immigration officials have threatened the safety of a Mexican journalist who sought lawful asylum. Martin Mendez, another reporter [supported by the National Press Club](#) and a host of journalism organizations, [voluntarily returned](#) to Mexico, where he is now living in hiding, after immigration officials refused to release him from detention despite finding that he had "credible fear" of returning to his home country.

"It is especially disturbing to hear that law enforcement officials in this country were prepared to carry out an order without even waiting to allow the appeals process work," said Barbara Cochran, president of the National Press Club's Journalism Institute. "That smacks of the kind of police state that our Constitution is designed to avoid."