



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARU MORA-VILLALPANDO

Maru Mora-Villalpando is an immigrants' rights activist who, like several other vocal advocates, now faces deportation.

# UNINTIMIDATED

**BY AARON BURKHALTER**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**M**aru Mora-Villalpando received the notice just before Christmas: a certified letter from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) that marked the start of her deportation proceedings.

This was a deliberate tactic, Mora-Villalpando said, used to silence her and her years of activism fighting for immigrant rights, particularly working against the Northwest Detention Center, a facility in Tacoma that can hold up to 1,575 people, making it one of the largest immigration prisons in the United States.

She was one of several activists this past month subjected to ICE deportation efforts. Ravi Ragbir, an immigrants-rights activist in New York, is being detained until he is deported, and Jean Montrevil was deported to Haiti in January.

If ICE's intent was to silence or slow down activism, it hasn't worked.

The detention and deportation of Ragbir and Montrevil sparked protests on Martin Luther King Jr. Day in New York that led to the arrest of several people, including members of the New York City Council.

And Mora-Villalpando has only amplified her work, traveling to the nation's capital to protest harsh immigration laws for the anniversary of President Donald Trump's inauguration, and again on Monday to attend his State of the Union address as a guest of U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.).

Mora-Villalpando recently spoke with Street Roots' Seattle-based sister paper, Real Change, about her activism and impending deportation.

**Aaron Burkhalter:** What did you think when you received the deportation notice?

**Maru Mora-Villalpando:** When I saw

## *Facing deportation, Seattle-based activist Maru Mora-Villalpando refuses to back down*

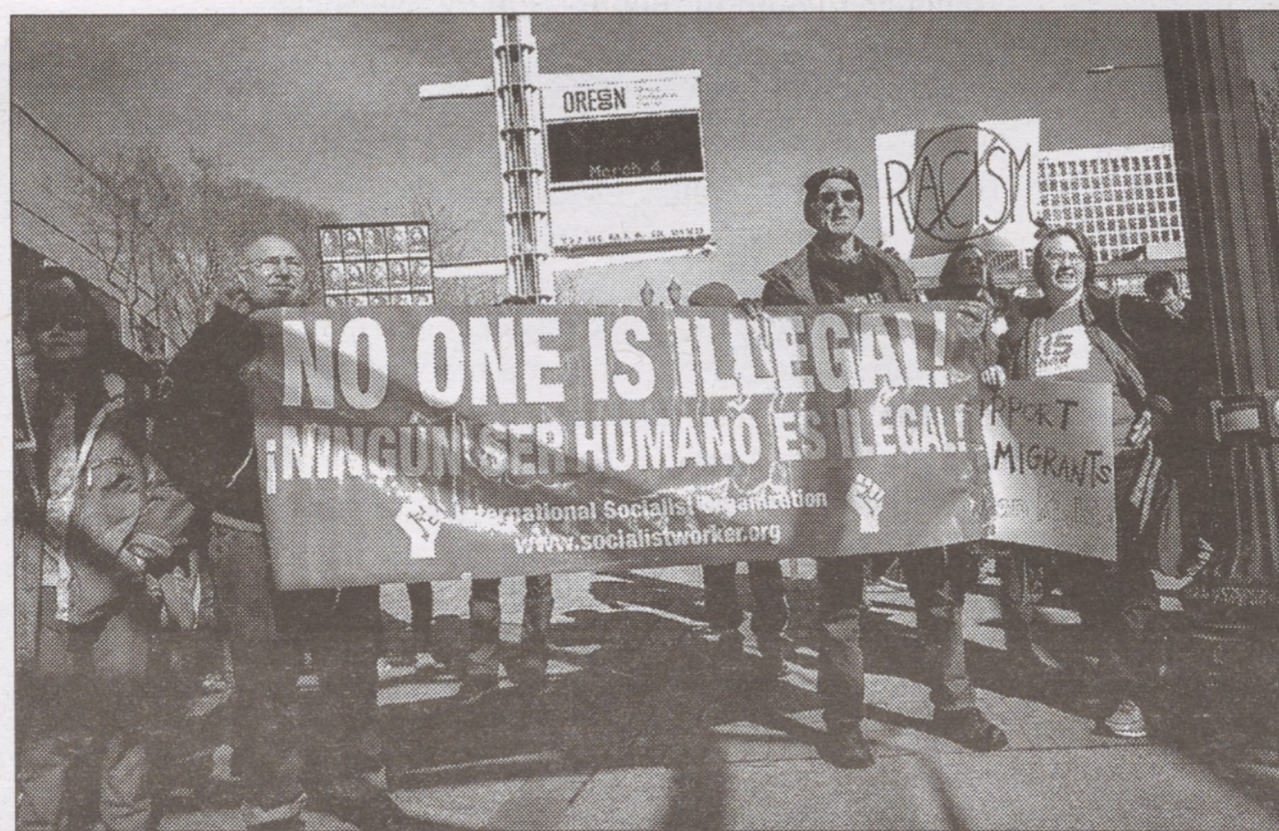


PHOTO BY JOSEPH GLODE

*Demonstrators participate in the Stand Up for the Dignity and Protection of Immigrants Rally on Feb. 25, 2017, at the Oregon Convention Center in Portland.*

the logo on the envelope, I realized immediately what it was. I figured that ICE wanted to start a petition proceeding against me. I kind of laughed inside, thinking, "So, they don't come to my door, they send me a letter instead." But I also thought immediately, "This is a warning. A warning to stop my work or slow down my work of fighting alongside people detained for our rights and for justice and liberation – and they obviously don't like what I'm doing, and they're trying to stop me."

**A.B.:** Since you received that order, many others have been detained or deported and sometimes very suddenly: Ravi Ragbir and Jean Montrevil in New York. What does it tell you about what's going on with Immigrations

and Customs Enforcement, that all of this is happening?

**M.M.V.:** It's obviously a very clear direction that they have taken, which is to become a political repression apparatus. We've said again and again: ICE was not created to help our communities. It's not a social service agency. We have departments at the federal level that are supposed to be for people's lives: The Department of Housing, the Department of Education. This is not such. This is a department that was created against immigrants, and really, against the whole society. Under this new administration, it's obvious that the war on immigrants that was declared in January last year with the first executive actions, being

very specific xenophobic and racist orders to remove us from the country, show that now also Trump has decided to utilize ICE as a police force to silence a dissident. And especially for us in the immigrant justice movement – we are an easy target because of our immigration status.

**A.B.:** It would seem to me that actions like this – the deportations, the notices to appear, using immigration enforcement in this way – would have a really chilling effect on activism. How is it changing or informing your work?

**M.M.V.:** I think the administration, this regime, showed from day one that they are not going to accept anybody that speaks against them or does anything against them. And so we've been ready for this for a really long time. The thing that is important to know is that the reason why they want to silence us is because we have been very effective.

We don't like to do this. People detained risk their deportation, their cases. They risk their lives when they organize. But they know that they have to do it. So we do it, too, knowing that there's a risk. Because if we don't do it, things are going to get worse. So when they are sending these warnings to be quiet, to stop doing what we're doing, the effect is the opposite. They're just making us stronger. I think this was shown when we decided to go public with my case. The response of the community, not only Washington state but beyond, has been overwhelmingly supportive and positive, and people are ready to continue the fight.

**A.B.:** What kinds of things are you seeing at the Northwest Detention Center now, and what is the nature of your work there?

**M.M.V.:** I receive calls from the detention center, from people that are saying that