

# TRIBUNAL PERMANENTE DE LOS PUEBLOS

## INTERVIEW

### Garifuna woman

**Macarena Gómez-Barris (MGB):** ¿Can you start by saying your name and telling a little bit of your story?

**Garifuna Woman (GW):** Well, our story here in the United States is a sad one. We had the opportunity of coming here, and some of us seized it and we are here to find a better life. We have come a long way, through a lot of sacrifices to search for a better future for our children. And when we got here, we had a court date and had to be waiting for any updates from court, but then the saddest thing happened: the shackles. Nobody told us we were going to be shackled. When we heard that they were going to let some of us come to the U.S., for our kids, nobody mentioned the shackles. So we came here, went to court, signed and were taken to another office behind the court. There, they did not explain why we were being shackled, they did not ask us anything, they just said, “give me your foot” and put the shackle on. After, they asked us if we had any questions and the first thing I asked is if we could work with these (shackles). Because I am here to work, to fight for a better life, for my son, not to warm someone else’s seat. I know it is dangerous; everywhere that we go we are in danger. Some people are saying that we will only have the shackles for three months, but when we ask the people that actually put them on them they say they don’t know.

So there we are, signing, signing, and signing. We go every month to sign; for instance, I have to go on September 10<sup>th</sup>. We have found some support with the Evangelical Spanish church here, and thank God they are helping us with pro-bono lawyers and those things. Because they ask us to have a lawyer, but how are we supposed to pay them. Lawyers here will charge at least 2,000 USD, and where are we going to get money if we are sitting doing nothing. It is a very sad thing. The way here was not easy, there was a lot of suffering, we had to put up with the cold. And once here, it was very sad. We are all here now, most of us shackled; and we are here doing nothing, nothing at all.

**MGB:** And they don’t say anything about when they’ll remove it? Nothing?

**GW:** No, they say nothing. And that looks bad. When we’re out in the streets people stare at us, they look at us from head to toe, they stare. And us, one the one hand, we can’t speak English, we don’t understand what people say when they talk to us. I’ve been asked if I’ve killed someone, three times, because these (shackles) are for criminals, not for people seeking refuge and work to try and survive with their children. So they’ve asked me, have you killed? What is that? And I say I don’t know, I don’t know why they put this thing on me. We’ve heard that this is to monitor people, to see if the address we gave is where we actually live, and so they know where we are, what places we go to. I asked if I could work and they said yes. But nobody hires you, not with the shackle, because they think of you as a criminal, a killer. So here we are, all day waiting for this to be removed, we’ll see. I have faith that we’ll have them off soon, because faith is never lost.

I cried and cried the first days. Specially when I found out I wouldn't be able to work, because that is what hurts the most. I am a fighter, a worker. And even though I only have one son, how can I provide for him while sitting down, I can't. Things are not easy here, if one doesn't work here one is nothing, and things are worse without papers.

**MGB:** And there's no key or something to take it off for the shower? Can you take it off for anything?

**GW:** We can shower with this. Actually they showed us a video of what we can and can't do with the shackles. We had to see the movie before they put them on.

**MGB:** And does it bother you?

**GW:** Yes, it is very frustrating. That is why I wear a handkerchief around it so I don't get blisters, because it is very bothersome in the ankle; there is always a lot of pressure. We never take it off, it never stops. So we are here waiting for the day when they'll call and tell us we can have it removed. Here we'll be waiting. They decide for us.