

2. Serawit Gezahegn Dejene

Who was Serawit Gezahegn Dejene? Serawit was an immigrant who came to the United States from Ethiopia in August 2024. “He was a dedicated and hardworking individual who dreamed of building a better life in the United States, not only for himself but for his loved ones.”

According to ICE, Serawit had cleared the initial steps to apply for asylum.

How did Serawit Gezahegn Dejene end up in ICE detention? Serawit was apprehended by the border patrol in Arizona shortly after arriving in the U.S. and was taken to the Eloy detention center. Serwit received medical attention from facility staff for back pain after his arrival.

How did Serawit Gezahegn Dejene die under ICE custody? In December 2024 he reported extreme fatigue and dizziness. Medical personnel noted “an elevated pulse and temperature, and a 20% weight loss.” It is unclear why such a drastic weight loss was not noticed previously. He was then transported to an emergency room where he was diagnosed with suspected lymphoma. On December 23, 2024 Mr. Dejene was again transported to the emergency room.

ICE claims that between January 1 and January 3, 2025, Mr. Dejene was diagnosed by hospital staff with acute respiratory distress and was placed on a ventilator on January 3rd. He passed away on January 29. The Maricopa County Office of the Medical Examiner, which performed his autopsy, listed his cause of death as “complications of multiple infections in the setting of human immunodeficiency virus.”

What happened after Serawit Gezahegn Dejene’s death? It is unclear why medical staff at Eloy did not know that Mr. Dejene was living with HIV, nor is it clear why they did not perform any tests that we know of, despite his multiple reports of pain and other symptoms, which would have uncovered any of the multitude of infections he was living with by the time of his death. His immunocompromised status could or should have been noted prior to his being moved to intensive care after an ER visit. It is possible that, in the four months that Mr. Dejene was in Eloy, medical staff never screened him for HIV or any other of the infections that eventually killed him.

Tragically, his life was cut short in just a few months of arriving in the United States, leaving everyone who knew him in shock and grief. Serawit had no immediate family members here in the US. A doctor, Beeletsega T. Yeneneh, MD, organized a fundraiser so that his family abroad could receive Serawit's remains for a proper burial in his homeland, Ethiopia.

Sources:

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-us-send-serawits-remains-home-to-ethiopia>
https://firrp.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Final_December-2025_Deadly-and-Dehumanizing-Conditions-in-the-Eloy-Detention-Center_June-2024-thru-Nov-2025.pdf