

President Barack H. Obama
The White House
Washington, DC

July 3, 2014

Dear President Obama:

We, the undersigned immigration, civil and human rights, faith, labor, anti-violence, and community organizations, urge you to reconsider the plan to expedite the deportation of Central American children to the dangers they escaped in their home countries. The administration's recent statements have placed far greater emphasis on deterrence of migration than on the importance of protection of children seeking safety. At a time when the region is confronted with a major humanitarian crisis, our nation cannot compromise on fundamental principles of compassion, fairness, and due process, nor on our international refugee protection obligations.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has found that almost 60 percent of children fleeing to the United States from Central America are asylum seekers.ⁱ The United States is not alone in seeing higher than normal migration flows – according to UNHCR, other countries in the region have experienced a sharp increase in the number of asylum applications filed by Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans since 2008. From 2008 to 2013, the number of such applications filed in Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Belize increased by 712 percent.

We are deeply concerned that the administration will circumvent the protections of the bipartisan Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) of 2008 and remove the children apprehended at the border through a non-judicial process. Instead of affording these children proper screening for trafficking and persecution, as well as the opportunity to receive fair and full consideration of their legal claims before an immigration judge, the administration appears to propose to quickly deport them, without access to legal counsel, following cursory screenings that have already proven entirely inadequate to identify genuine refugee claims among Mexican children.ⁱⁱ

Congress gave consideration to the unique circumstances of children when it enacted the TVPRA. The law includes protections such as the facilitation of counsel and the appointment of child advocates that help ensure that unaccompanied children from non-contiguous countries receive proper care and that their requests for asylum and other legal relief are processed fairly and in a way that is consistent with their age and development. As it stands, the proposed plan would appear to place at risk these existing legal protections, jeopardizing the lives of children seeking safety in the United States. Undermining due process and protection under the law is not the right answer, and certainly will not appease the criticisms of those who have been calling for more punitive and aggressive enforcement. The cost of pushing vulnerable children back into dangerous or deadly situations is simply too high.

Now is the time for America to demonstrate its international leadership and commitment to refugee protection and due process. We oppose any plan to amend the TVPRA to weaken the

protections afforded to children from Central America, and we urge you to ensure that the rights and safety of these children are guaranteed.

Sincerely,

18MillionRising

9to5

Advancement Project

Alliance for Children and Families

American Civil Liberties Union

American Immigration Council

American Immigration Lawyers Association

America's Voice Education Fund

Asian Americans Advancing Justice

Black Alliance for Just Immigration

Border Action Network

Catholic Charities

Catholic Legal Immigration Network Inc. (CLINIC)

Center for Gender & Refugee Studies

Center for Popular Democracy

Church World Service

Detention Watch Network

Farmworker Justice

First Focus

HIAS

Hispanic Federation

Human Rights First

Immigrant Defense Project

Immigrant Legal Resource Center

KIND

League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

NAFSA – Association of International Education

National Alliance to End Sexual Violence

National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities (NALACC)

National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health

National Center for Victims of Crime

National Council of Jewish Women

National Council of La Raza

National Disability Rights Network

National Education Association

National Employment Law Project

National Immigrant Justice Center

National Immigration Law Center

National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health

National Network to End Domestic Violence

National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
NETWORK – A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
The Advocates for Human Rights
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
United We Dream
United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
Women’s Refugee Commission

Adrian Dominican Sisters
Alliance for a Just Society
Alliance of Baptists
Alliance San Diego
American Association of University Professors - AFT
American Friends Service Committee - Miami
American Gateways
Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Asian Law Caucus
Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Chicago
Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Los Angeles
Asian Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence
Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach
Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council
ASISTA Immigration Assistance
Border Angels
Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition
California Immigrant Policy Center
California Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance
California Latinas for Reproductive Justice
California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation
California Pan-Ethnic Health Network
Capital Area Immigrants’ Rights (CAIR) Coalition
Casa de Esperanza: National Latina Network for Healthy Families and Communities
CASA de Maryland
CASA de Virginia
Catholic Migration Services
Center for Active Nonviolence & Peacemaking
Center for Employment Training
Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law
Center for Public Policy Priorities - Texas
Center for the Human Rights of Children, Loyola University Chicago
Central American Resource Center of Northern California (CARECEN)
Centro de los Derechos del Migrante, Inc.

Coalicion de Organizaciones Latino-Americanas
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA)
Coalition on Human Needs
Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking
COFEM - Council of Mexican Federations
Comite VIDA
Conflict Alternatives
Dominican Sisters of Houston
Dominican Sisters of San Rafael
Dream Defenders
East Bay Immigration Coalition - EBIYC
Ecumenical Peace Institute – Clergy and Laity Concerned
Educators for Fair Consideration
El Quinto Sol de America
Empire Justice Center
Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project
Fellowship Congregational UCC
Filipino Migrant Center
First Friends New Jersey & New York
Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project
Florida Coastal Immigrant Rights Clinic
Florida Immigrant Coalition
Franciscan Action Network
Freedom Network USA
Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission
Friends of Broward Detainees
Fuerza Del Valle Workers' Center
Futures Without Violence
Gainesville (Florida) Interfaith Alliance for Immigrant Justice
Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights
GetEQUAL Action
Global Justice Institute
Guatemalan Maya Center
Human Development Resources of Westchester
Humane Borders
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Immigrant Detainee Accompaniment Program
Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project
Immigrant Survivors Legal Assistance
Immigration Center for Women and Children
Inland Empire Immigrant Youth Coalition
Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights (CLUE-CA)
International Association of Forensic Nurses
Jewish Women International
Jesuit Social Research Institute – Loyola University New Orleans
Justice Strategies

Kentucky Equal Justice Center
Korean Community Center of the East Bay
La Raza Centro Legal
Latino Coalition for a Healthy California (LCHC)
Latinas Educating and Empowering Communities
Maxwell Street Legal Clinic
Metropolitan Community Churches
New York Legal Assistance Group
North American Dominican Justice Promoters
North California Coalition of Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking
North Carolina Immigrant Rights Project
Northwest Health Law Advocates
Northwest Immigrant Rights Project
Oklahoma Policy Institute
OneAmerica
Out4Immigration
Pacific Islander Cancer Survivor Network
Pax Christi USA
Peace Action
Pennsylvania Council of Churches
Public Counsel
Public Justice Center
Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities Coalition
Research Action Design (RAD)
Rural Women's Health Project
Service Employees International Union Local 87
Services, Immigrant Rights, and Education Network (SIREN)
SHARE El Salvador
Shem Center for Interfaith Spirituality
Sistas and Brothas United
Sisters of Good Shepherd, New York
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
Sisters of St. Joseph-Baden
Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester
Social Justice Collaborative
South Texas Civil Rights Project
Street Level Health Project
Students Working for Equal Rights
Texas Appleseed
The Voices and Faces Project
TODEC Legal Center
Transgender Law Center
Tulsa Metropolitan Ministry
University of California, Davis School of Law Immigration Law Clinic
University of Miami School of Law, Immigration Clinic
United Families

United Methodist Women
Vermont Immigration and Asylum Advocates
Victim Rights Law Center
Virginia Coalition for Latino Organizations
Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy
Voices for Utah Children
We Own the DREAM
WeCount!
Women Against Military Madness
Women of Color Network
Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights
Youth and Young Adult Network of the National Farm Worker Ministry (YAYA-NFWM)
YWCA of the Greater Capital Region, Inc.

ⁱ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Children on the Run: Unaccompanied Children Leaving Central America and Mexico and the need for International Protection*, 13 March 2014, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/532180c24.html>

ⁱⁱ See, e.g. Betsy Cavendish and Maru Cortazar, Appleseed, *Children at the Border: the Screening, Protection and Repatriation of Unaccompanied Mexican Minors* (2011), available at <http://appleseednetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Children-At-The-Border1.pdf>.