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U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Issues Letter to U.S. President and DHS Secretary Regarding ICE Raids Involving Central American Refugees

WASHINGTON--By majority vote the Commissioners of the United States Commission on Civil Rights ("Commission"), have issued a letter that requests the immediate end of the raids currently being carried out by the Department of Homeland Security ("DHS") and Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE") against Central American refugees.

The Commission has a long-standing history of examining the civil rights concerns surrounding the U.S. immigration system. Most recently, on September 17, 2015, the Commission issued to the President and Congress its Statutory Enforcement Report entitled, "With Liberty and Justice for All, The State of Civil Rights at Immigration Detention Facilities."

The Commission has examined the issue of access to counsel for families in detention and found that the lack of, or obstruction to access to legal counsel afforded to these refugees in their initial, underlying proceedings brings into question the enforceability of the orders of deportation upon which the present ICE raids are based. The Commission respectfully requests the DHS to cease these ICE raids of Central American women and children, and that each such person scheduled for deportation who is seeking asylum have their cases reviewed for violations of their due process rights, and have the opportunity to have pro bono counsel to ensure that they have had an adequate opportunity to present any basis for asylum status if they did not have an adequate opportunity to do so in the first instance.

Commission Chairman Martin R. Castro on behalf of a majority of the Commission stated, "As the nation's civil rights watchdog, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission cannot stand by silent while our federal government deports refugee women and children whose due process rights may have been deprived in the first instance, to potentially life-threatening situations in their home countries. To continue these deportations to proceed is counter to our values as Americans."

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights matters and issuing a federal civil rights enforcement report. For information about Commission's reports and meetings, visit <http://www.usccr.gov>