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Statement by Secretary Johnson on Southwest Border Security

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In Fiscal Year 2016, total apprehensions by the Border Patrol on our southwest border, between ports of entry, numbered 408,870. This represents an increase over FY15, but was lower than FY14 and FY13, and a fraction of the number of apprehensions routinely observed from the 1980s through 2008. Apprehensions are an indicator of total attempts to cross the border illegally. Meanwhile, the demographics of illegal migration on our southern border has changed significantly over the last 15 years – far fewer Mexicans and single adults are attempting to cross the border without authorization, but more families and unaccompanied children are fleeing poverty and violence in Central America. In 2014, Central Americans apprehended on the southern border outnumbered Mexicans for the first time. In 2016, it happened again.

Southwest Border Apprehensions - FY13-FY16

Category	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16
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Category	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16
Unaccompanied children	38,759	68,541	39,970	59,692
Family members	14,855	68,445	39,838	77,674
Individuals	360,783	342,385	251,525	271,504
Total	414,397	479,371	331,333	408,870

Unaccompanied children and families have presented new challenges in our immigration system. I have traveled to the southwest border 17 times over the last 34 months as Secretary and have seen this personally. We are determined to treat migrants in a humane manner. At the same time, we must enforce our immigration laws consistent with our enforcement priorities. This has included, and will continue to include, providing individuals with an opportunity to assert claims for asylum and other forms of humanitarian relief.

At the same time, we are providing a safe, alternative paths to our country for individuals in need of humanitarian protection. Earlier this year, the Government of Costa Rica announced its agreement to enter into a protection transfer arrangement with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration to help address the Central American migration challenge. We're also establishing an in-country referral program in countries of origin including Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. This program enables vulnerable residents in the region to be considered for refugee protection in the United States after being screened and interviewed by DHS officers. We have also announced an expansion of the categories of individuals eligible for participation in our Central American Minors program when accompanied by a qualified child. We promote and encourage use of these programs.

Border security alone cannot overcome the powerful push factors of poverty and violence that exist in Central America. Walls alone cannot prevent illegal migration. Ultimately, the solution is long-term investment in Central America to address the underlying push factors in the region. We continue to work closely with our federal partners and the governments in the region, and are pleased with the \$750 million Congress approved in FY 2016 for support and aid to Central America. We urge Congress to provide additional resources in FY 2017.

But, there is more to do for border security. I urge the next Administration and the next Congress to continue to make smart investments in border security technology, equipment and other resources. This is what our experts on the border - those on the front lines every day, charged with the responsibility of protecting our borders – tell me each time I ask them.

At all times throughout President Obama's administration, we have endeavored to enforce the immigration laws in a fair and humane way, consistent with the immigration system we have. But, the reality is the system is broken, and badly need of comprehensive immigration reform that only Congress can provide. For one thing, we must reckon with the millions of undocumented immigrants who live in the shadows in this country, who've been here for years, and who should be given the opportunity to come forward and get right with the law. It is my profound hope that the next Congress will finally address this and other issues, and enact comprehensive immigration reform.

Other points:

- The new immigration enforcement priorities President Obama and I announced in November 2014, which focus on serious convicted criminals and those apprehended at the border, are being implemented effectively by our immigration enforcement personnel. Our priorities are reflected in actual results. Today,

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over 99% of those in immigration detention fit within one of our enforcement priorities; and around 85% are within the top priority for removal. In 2009, just 35% of those deported by ICE were convicted criminals; today that percentage is about 60%. Enforcement actions that began early this year, focused on families and unaccompanied children now over 18 that were apprehended at the border.

- Earlier this week, I paid my sixth visit to Mexico as Secretary of Homeland Security. On this visit I met with President Peña Nieto, my counterpart the Secretary of Government Miguel Osorio Chong, Secretary of Foreign Affairs Claudia Ruiz Massieu, Secretary of Finance Jose Antonio Meade, and Attorney General Arely Gomez Gonzalez. Our working relationship is strong, and we've committed to do even more for our mutual border security interests. Additionally, we've resolved to create a standing U.S.-Mexican working group, staffed largely with career officials, to ensure a permanent dialogue on security issues that will sustain itself past the Obama and Peña Nieto Administrations.
- In recent months we've seen an influx of Haitian nationals on our southern border, principally at certain land ports of entry. On September 22, I announced we would resume removals of Haitian nationals in accordance with our existing enforcement priorities. In light of Hurricane Matthew, which struck Haiti on October 4, removal flights to Haiti have been suspended temporarily. Working with the Government of Haiti, DHS intends to resume removal flights as soon as possible. DHS and the Department of State are working with the Government of Haiti and other key partners to ensure that removals occur in as humane and minimally disruptive a manner as possible. The policy change I announced on September 22 remains in effect. Haitians attempting to enter the United States

without authorization will continue to be placed into immigration detention.

- With our interagency partners, DHS continues to aggressively target and dismantle the transnational criminal organizations that smuggle and exploit migrants. One recent example is “Operation ALL IN.” This operation resulted in the apprehension of 100 individuals now facing federal prosecution at either the federal, state, or local level. Those arrested as part of Operation ALL IN include smugglers, as well as gang members and sex offenders.

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