

November 18, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We, the undersigned civil rights and civil liberties, human rights, faith, immigration, labor, criminal justice, legal, children's rights, and domestic violence advocacy organizations, are gravely concerned about your administration's massive expansion of detention for young children and their mothers who are fleeing extreme violence in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. Though many of these children and their mothers qualify for asylum protection under U.S. law, they are being deported so rapidly as to deny them a fair opportunity to seek protection.

As you consider taking executive action to reform the immigration system, we urge you to address the fundamental problems with the detention and expedited deportation of these children and their mothers. Indeed, executive action can wait no longer. Delay has only meant more broken families, more workers stuck in the shadows, and more businesses that are stymied by the broken system. We urge you to act immediately to do what is within your legal authority to fix the immigration system and take bold and inclusive action to make our enforcement system more humane.

We applaud your goal of protecting immigrant families whose lives are interwoven into the fabric of American communities. For that same reason, we call upon you to stop detaining these vulnerable children and mothers who are fleeing violence in Central America and hoping to join with relatives already living in the United States. In 2009, abuse and mistreatment at a Texas facility compelled Immigration and Customs Enforcement to stop using the facility to detain families. Detention profoundly impacts the emotional and physical well-being of children. It inflicts unspeakable pain on mothers to watch their children suffer in detention. It forces them to give up hope. Most of the mothers currently in detention have relatives or sponsors in the United States willing to take them in and support them. They do not have to be—and should not be—in detention.

The evidence is undeniable that many of these children and their mothers, who have been raped, kidnapped, beaten or shot to near death, are refugees who qualify for protection under U.S. law. Extremely high percentages of these detained women and their children have been granted asylum by immigration judges or been found to have a credible fear of persecution by asylum officers. Domestic violence in these Central American countries has reached crisis proportions. A U.N. Special Rapporteur reported in July that violence against women in Honduras is "widespread and systematic" and that 95 percent of violent crimes against women go unpunished by the police or other law enforcement. In most cases however, the U.S. government continues to rush these children and families through an

expedited process, and has deported many back into the hands of their abusers and the very danger from which they fled. They deserve better treatment by the United States.

We urge you to stop the dramatic expansion of family detention, including the building of an enormous new facility in Dilley, TX. Instead, we recommend you greatly expand the use of alternatives to detention, bonds and other methods that are far less costly for American taxpayers and are highly effective in ensuring court appearances. Moreover, the removal process must be made more fair and guarantee that families fleeing violence have meaningful access to asylum, including access to legal counsel.

We look forward to the reforms you will implement on immigration and ask that you properly address the needs of these families. Please contact Greg Chen, Director of Advocacy at American Immigration Lawyers Association, gchen@aila.org, 202/507-7615, with any questions or followup.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

African American Ministers In Action

Alliance for a Just Society

America's Voice Education Fund

American Civil Liberties Union

American Immigration Council

American Immigration Lawyers Association

Asian Americans Advancing Justice

Asian Law Alliance

Asian Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence

ASISTA Immigration Assistance

Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities

Center for Community Change

Central American Resource Center (CARECEN-DC)

Church of the Brethren, Office of Public Witness

Church World Service

Coalition on Human Needs

Detention Watch Network

Farmworker Justice

First Focus

Futures Without Violence

Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA

HIAS

Hispanic Federation

Immigration Center for Women and Children

International Rescue Committee (IRC)
Jesuit Conference of the United States
Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
MALDEF
National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities (NALACC)
National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA)
National Council of LA Raza (NCLR)
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Immigration Law Center
National Immigration Project
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National Network to End Domestic Violence
Pax Christi USA
Refugee and Immigration Ministries, Disciples Home Missions (Christian Church, Disciples of Christ)
Salvadoran American National Network (SANN)
Services, Immigrant Rights, and Education Network (SIREN)
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
Sojourners
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
Tahirih Justice Center
United We Dream
Washington Office on Latin America
Women's Refugee Commission

State and Local Organizations

Advocates for Human Rights (Minnesota)
Alianzas de Phoenixville (Pennsylvania)
Alliance San Diego (California)
American Gateways (Texas)
Americans for Immigrant Justice (Florida)
Annunciation House, Inc. (Texas)
Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Los Angeles (California)
Capital Area Immigrants' Rights Coalition (Washington, D.C.)
CASA de Maryland

CASA de Virginia
Causa Oregon
Central American Resource Center-D.C. (Washington, D.C.)
Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota
Church Council of Greater Seattle (Washington)
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) (California)
Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition
Comite de Derechos Humanos Forks (Washington)
Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto (California)
Community to Community Development (Washington)
Community to Community, Bellingham (Washington)
Conversations With Friends (Minnesota)
Diocesan Migrant & Refugee Services, Inc. (Texas)
Employee Rights Center-San Diego (California)
Equality New Mexico
The Family Partnership (Minnesota)
Farmworker Association of Florida, Inc
Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project (Arizona)
Florida Immigrant Coalition
Friends of Broward Detainees (Florida)
Good Shepherd United Church of Christ (Arizona)
Grassroots Leadership (Texas)
Greater Hartford Legal Aid (Connecticut)
Green Valley / Sahuaritas Samaritans (Arizona)
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society-Pennsylvania
Hispanic American Law Student Association, Florida Coastal School of Law
Human Rights Initiative of North Texas
Human Rights Law Society, Florida Coastal School of Law
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Immigrant and Human Rights Clinic, Florida Coastal School of Law
Immigrant Defense Project (New York)
Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota
Interfaith Center for Worker Justice-San Diego (California)
Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice-San Diego (California)
La Raza Centro Legal (California)
Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center (Texas)
Las Cruces Friends, Quakers, Peace and Social Concerns Committee (New Mexico)
Latino Advocacy (Washington)
League of Women Voters of Greater Las Cruces (New Mexico)
Los Angeles Center for Law and Justice (California)

Make The Road New York
Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA)
Migrant Power Movement (Pennsylvania)
The Minneapolis Foundation (Minnesota)
Nationalities Service Center (Pennsylvania)
New Mexico Faith Coalition for Immigrant Justice
New York Immigration Coalition
North Carolina Justice Center
Northwest Immigrant Rights Project
OneAmerica (Washington)
Palm Beach County Coalition for Immigrant Rights (PBCCIR) (Florida)
Pennsylvania Immigration Resource Center (PIRC)
Philadelphia chapter of Japanese American Citizens League (Pennsylvania)
Pittsburgh Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA) (Pennsylvania)
Political Asylum Immigration Representation Project (Massachusetts)
Promise Arizona
Public Counsel (California)
Reformed Church of Highland Park (New Jersey)
Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES) (Texas)
Refugio del Rio Grande (Texas)
Sanctuary for Families (New York)
The Second Step (Massachusetts)
Sisters of Mercy (Nebraska)
Sisters of Mercy, Mid-Atlantic Community Leadership Team
Southern Poverty Law Center
Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition
Texas Appleseed
UC Davis Immigration Law Clinic (California)
UC Hastings Center for Gender and Refugee Studies (CGRS)-San Francisco (California)
Unitarian Universalist Pennsylvania Legislative Advocacy Network (UUPLAN)
Voces de la Frontera (Wisconsin)
Waco Immigration Alliance (Texas)
Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Women's Foundation of Minnesota
Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights at the University of Chicago (Illinois)

cc: Cecilia Munoz, Director of the Domestic Policy Council
Lynn Rosenthal, White House Advisor on Violence Against Women
Jeh Johnson, Secretary of Homeland Security
Alejandro Mayorkas, Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security

Tom Winkowski, Acting Director, Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Leon Rodriguez, Director, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Eric Holder, Attorney General
Juan Osuna, Director, Executive Office for Immigration Review

Shelly Pitterman, Regional Representative, UNHCR Americas