

October 12, 2016

Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Mr. President:

We, the participants of the shadow summit, “The U.S. Response to Central American Refugees,” held September 20 in New York, urge you to end the deterrence strategy pursued by your Administration to stem the flow of Central American refugees seeking protection from violence and persecution. We urge you to invest in robust protection programs which give these vulnerable refugees an alternative to making the dangerous journey out of their countries, while ensuring that those who do seek protection at our borders can do so in a safe, just, and humane way.

Mr. President, we applaud your leadership in setting a refugee ceiling of 110,000 refugees from around the world for FY 2017, as well as your initiative to call upon other nations to commit more resources and resettlement space to the world’s refugees. However, we are deeply concerned with U.S. policy toward asylum-seekers and refugees in our own region and inside our own borders.

It is our view that the deterrence strategy your Administration has pursued, which has sent thousands back to danger, has failed to stem the flow of refugees from Central America. The individuals seeking asylum we have met and worked with, along with countless others, made the decision to flee only when they felt they had no other choice from which to protect themselves. We urge you to end such practices as family detention, the support of Mexican interdictions and return without due process and screening, and the deportation of vulnerable refugees from the United States who have not had full access to due process in U.S. courts.

We encourage you to fully fund and expand protection programs announced by your Administration, including the Central American minor (CAM) program and in-country refugee processing and to support a comprehensive approach to strengthening Mexico’s asylum system in conjunction with civil society and international organizations. Meanwhile, we urge you to immediately grant Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for individuals from the Northern Triangle countries of Central America—Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

Finally, we urge you to direct longer-term, human rights-focused U.S. assistance to address the root causes of violence, corruption, impunity and poverty driving these refugees from their countries, as opposed to enforcement efforts.

Mr. President, again we applaud your leadership in convening world leaders at the United Nations to address the world’s global refugee crisis. We urge you to show that same leadership in our own backyard, with vulnerable children and families leaving the Northern Triangle of Central America.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

American Immigration Lawyers Association

Amnesty International USA

Cristosal

Daughters of Charity

Global Campaign to End Detention

Kids in Need of Defense

Latin America Working Group

Maryknoll Sisters

New York University School of Medicine

Oxfam

Scalabrini International Migration Network

Women's Refugee Commission

World Relief

Cc: Honorable John Kerry, Secretary of State

Honorable Jeh Johnson, Secretary, Department of Homeland Security