

December 31, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

The undersigned organizations write to express our opposition to the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) reported plans to conduct raids in communities nationwide to round up and deport Central American children and their parents.

If these plans are implemented, many families will be deprived of the right to seek protection from persecution. The vast majority of children and families that have been ordered removed by immigration judges were ordered removed in absentia. It is likely that most of these families failed to appear in court because they did not receive adequate information from DHS explaining their obligation to go to court or their right to receive a fair hearing on their asylum, Withholding of Removal, and related claims. Moreover, raids would convey the message that these families are a threat to border security, when the reality is that most are asylum seekers in need of humanitarian protection. Given their high rate of eligibility for asylum-related claims, these children and their parents should be treated as an exceptionally vulnerable population and should not be removed without an opportunity to seek relief before a judge.

We urge you to renounce the use of such harsh tactics against this incredibly vulnerable group that has already suffered horrible, uncontrolled gang violence, domestic violence, and other forms of persecution. [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services data shows that 88 percent](#) of the mothers and children detained in the three family detention centers in Pennsylvania and Texas are proving to the government they are likely to be found eligible for asylum and other forms of humanitarian relief. This data is consistent with an October 2015, [UNHCR report](#) finding that 82 percent of women and girls that the U.S. government interviewed in fiscal year 2015 from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico in the expedited removal context proved they have a significant possibility of winning asylum or protection under the Convention against Torture. The women and girls not placed into expedited removal, and who were released at the border, are fleeing similar situations, yet most were not provided with information about accessing asylum or other humanitarian protection in the U.S.

Despite this growing, and now, overwhelming, evidence that many Central American families deserve protection, DHS has pursued an aggressive enforcement strategy against them. The agency has escalated the use of family detention, placing thousands of children and mothers in massive, remote facilities. DHS and the immigration courts subject families to rapid deportation procedures that deprive them of fundamental due process. The agency's aggressive approach has continued even after two federal courts ruled against these practices (see *Flores v. Johnson* and *R.I.L.R. v. Johnson*). Under the guidelines promulgated by Secretary Johnson last November, individuals "who qualify for asylum or other forms of relief" should not be prioritized for

removal at all. Almost all of the families at issue put themselves into proceedings by turning themselves in to the authorities at the border after harrowing journeys of thousands of miles.

DHS has failed to provide adequate information to families about their rights and responsibilities in the immigration system. DHS has also failed to offer community-based services to facilitate appearances at court. Finally, the government has not provided appointed counsel to families who would otherwise go without representation. In fact, most of these families have no legal representation—the single most important factor in ensuring their appearance in court. Each of these steps would increase court appearance rates without resorting to the kind of tactics that will demonize a population in need of care and assistance.

The United States has always been a beacon of hope for asylum seekers. Over the past several months, you have championed the cause of protecting Syrian refugees when many questioned whether our nation should still be providing them refuge. We ask you to send that same signal now with respect to the families fleeing Central America and to be the same kind of champion for their protection.

Please contact Greg Chen, Director of Advocacy at the American Immigration Lawyers Association, 202/716-5818, gchen@aila.org, regarding this letter.

Sincerely,

9to5, National Association of Working Women
The Advocates for Human Rights
African Awareness Association
Agora, St. Paul, MN
Alianza Americas
Alianza de Organizaciones Guatemaltecas ADOGUAH
Alliance For Global Justice
Alliance of AIDS Services - Carolina
Alliance San Diego
America's Voice
American Civil Liberties Union
American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)
American Immigration Council
American Immigration Lawyers Association
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)
Americans for Immigrant Justice
ARISE
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - AAJC
Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence
Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)
Austin Jewish Voice for Peace
Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture
Berkeley Palma Siruani Sister City Association

Border Action Network
Border Network for Human Rights
Campaign for Community Change and Fair Immigration Reform Movement
Capital Area Immigrants' Rights (CAIR) Coalition
CARECEN DC
CARECEN Los Angeles
Casa de Esperanza
Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis
Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC)
Center for Women Policy Studies
Centro Savila
Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Refugee and Immigration Ministries
Church of the Brethren
Church World Service
Coalition de Detechos Humanos
Cobb Immigrant Alliance
Cocies
Colectiva Legal del Pueblo
Colibri Center for Human Rights
Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach
Community Initiatives for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement (CIVIC)
Conversations With Friends - Minnesota's program visiting people detained by ICE
Crisis Intervention Services
Dolores Street Community Services
DomesticSexual Assault Outreach Center
Dominican Development Center, Inc
Durango Unido en Chicago
El CENTRO de Igualdad y Derechos
El Centro Hispano
FaithAction International House
Familia: Trans Queer Liberation Movement
Farmworker Justice
Fighting for Equal Education
First Focus
Florida Coastal School of Law Clinical Programs
Focus on Humanity
Friends of Broward Detainees
Friendship Office of the Americas
Frontera de Cristo
Futures Without Violence
Georgia Detention Watch
Grassroots Leadership
HIAS
Hispanic Health Network
Human Rights First

Human Rights Observation/Honduras
Humane Borders
Ignatian Solidarity Network
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Immigrant Justice Corps
Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota
Immigration Taskforce, Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Institute for Policy Studies, New Internationalism Project
International Rescue Committee
Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault
IowaCASA
ISAI AH
Jesuit Refugee Service/USA
Jewish Community Action
Just Foreign Policy
Justice For Our Neighbors-Nebraska
Justice Strategies
Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)
Kino Border Initiative
La Hermandad Hank Lacayo Youth & Family Center
La Union del Pueblo Entero
La Voz de los de Abajo Chicago
Latin America Working Group Education Fund (LAWGEF)
Latin American Coalition
Latin American Youth Center/Maryland Multicultural Youth Centers
Latino Commission on AIDS
Latinos in the Deep South
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
League of United Latin American Citizens
Legal Momentum
Legal Services for Children
Louisiana AIDS Advocacy Network
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
MIRA Coalitions
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Council of Jewish Women
National Guestworker Alliance
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Immigration Law Center
National Justice for Our Neighbors
National Korean American Service & Education Consortium
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National Organization for Women

Navigate MN
The Needham Area Immigration Justice Task Force
New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice
NYU Center for Health and Human Rights
Nicaragua Center For Community Action
Nicaragua Network
Nisaa African Family Services
Not 1 More Coalition GA
OneAmerica
Orange County Immigrant Youth United
Pax Christi USA
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A)
Primera Iglesia Bautista Hispana de Savannah, INC.
Public Counsel
Red Mexicana de Lideres y Organizaciones Migrantes
Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES)
Rights Action
Rochester Committee on Latin America (ROCLA)
Safe Passage Project
Salvadoran American National Network (SANN)
San Diego Immigrant Rights Consortium
San Francisco School of the Americas Watch
San Solano Missions
Sanctuary for Families
Savannah Latina
Save the Children
SF Bay Area Guatemalan Committee
Sisters of Mercy, Institute Justice Team
Sojourners
Southeast Asian Coalition
Southern Border Communities Coalition
St. Cyril of Alexandria Parish
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Stop The Checkpoints
SustainUS
Task Force on the Americas
Teatro de la Séptima Generación/Seventh Generation Theatre
Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition
TODEC LEGAL CENTER
Transformative Healing
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
U.S.-El Salvador Sister Cities
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
United We Dream
UU College of Social Justice
Washtenaw Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights

We Belong Together
Women's Refugee Commission
Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights at the University of Chicago