

President Barack H. Obama  
The White House  
Washington, DC

July 3, 2014

Dear President Obama:

We, the undersigned immigration, civil and human rights, faith, labor, anti-violence, and community organizations, urge you to reconsider the plan to expedite the deportation of Central American children to the dangers they escaped in their home countries. The administration's recent statements have placed far greater emphasis on deterrence of migration than on the importance of protection of children seeking safety. At a time when the region is confronted with a major humanitarian crisis, our nation cannot compromise on fundamental principles of compassion, fairness, and due process, nor on our international refugee protection obligations.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has found that almost 60 percent of children fleeing to the United States from Central America are asylum seekers.<sup>i</sup> The United States is not alone in seeing higher than normal migration flows – according to UNHCR, other countries in the region have experienced a sharp increase in the number of asylum applications filed by Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans since 2008. From 2008 to 2013, the number of such applications filed in Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Belize increased by 712 percent.

We are deeply concerned that the administration will circumvent the protections of the bipartisan Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) of 2008 and remove the children apprehended at the border through a non-judicial process. Instead of affording these children proper screening for trafficking and persecution, as well as the opportunity to receive fair and full consideration of their legal claims before an immigration judge, the administration appears to propose to quickly deport them, without access to legal counsel, following cursory screenings that have already proven entirely inadequate to identify genuine refugee claims among Mexican children.<sup>ii</sup>

Congress gave consideration to the unique circumstances of children when it enacted the TVPRA. The law includes protections such as the facilitation of counsel and the appointment of child advocates that help ensure that unaccompanied children from non-contiguous countries receive proper care and that their requests for asylum and other legal relief are processed fairly and in a way that is consistent with their age and development. As it stands, the proposed plan would appear to place at risk these existing legal protections, jeopardizing the lives of children seeking safety in the United States. Undermining due process and protection under the law is not the right answer, and certainly will not appease the criticisms of those who have been calling for more punitive and aggressive enforcement. The cost of pushing vulnerable children back into dangerous or deadly situations is simply too high.

Now is the time for America to demonstrate its international leadership and commitment to refugee protection and due process. We oppose any plan to amend the TVPRA to weaken the

protections afforded to children from Central America, and we urge you to ensure that the rights and safety of these children are guaranteed.

Sincerely,

18MillionRising  
9to5  
Advancement Project  
Alliance for Children and Families  
American Civil Liberties Union  
American Immigration Council  
American Immigration Lawyers Association  
America's Voice Education Fund  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice  
Black Alliance for Just Immigration  
Border Action Network  
Catholic Charities  
Catholic Legal Immigration Network Inc. (CLINIC)  
Center for Gender & Refugee Studies  
Center for Popular Democracy  
Church World Service  
Detention Watch Network  
Farmworker Justice  
First Focus  
HIAS  
Hispanic Federation  
Human Rights First  
Immigrant Defense Project  
Immigrant Legal Resource Center  
KIND  
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)  
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service  
NAFSA – Association of International Education  
National Alliance to End Sexual Violence  
National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities (NALACC)  
National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health  
National Center for Victims of Crime  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Council of La Raza  
National Disability Rights Network  
National Education Association  
National Employment Law Project  
National Immigrant Justice Center  
National Immigration Law Center  
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health  
National Network to End Domestic Violence

National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights  
National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance  
National Resource Center on Domestic Violence  
NETWORK – A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby  
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)  
The Advocates for Human Rights  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
United We Dream  
United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants  
Women’s Refugee Commission

Adrian Dominican Sisters  
Alliance for a Just Society  
Alliance of Baptists  
Alliance San Diego  
American Association of University Professors - AFT  
American Friends Service Committee - Miami  
American Gateways  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Asian Law Caucus  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Chicago  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Los Angeles  
Asian Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence  
Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach  
Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council  
ASISTA Immigration Assistance  
Border Angels  
Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition  
California Immigrant Policy Center  
California Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance  
California Latinas for Reproductive Justice  
California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation  
California Pan-Ethnic Health Network  
Capital Area Immigrants’ Rights (CAIR) Coalition  
Casa de Esperanza: National Latina Network for Healthy Families and Communities  
CASA de Maryland  
CASA de Virginia  
Catholic Migration Services  
Center for Active Nonviolence & Peacemaking  
Center for Employment Training  
Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law  
Center for Public Policy Priorities - Texas  
Center for the Human Rights of Children, Loyola University Chicago  
Central American Resource Center of Northern California (CARECEN)  
Centro de los Derechos del Migrante, Inc.

Coalicion de Organizaciones Latino-Americanas  
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA)  
Coalition on Human Needs  
Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking  
COFEM - Council of Mexican Federations  
Comite VIDA  
Conflict Alternatives  
Dominican Sisters of Houston  
Dominican Sisters of San Rafael  
Dream Defenders  
East Bay Immigration Coalition - EBIYC  
Ecumenical Peace Institute – Clergy and Laity Concerned  
Educators for Fair Consideration  
El Quinto Sol de America  
Empire Justice Center  
Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project  
Fellowship Congregational UCC  
Filipino Migrant Center  
First Friends New Jersey & New York  
Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project  
Florida Coastal Immigrant Rights Clinic  
Florida Immigrant Coalition  
Franciscan Action Network  
Freedom Network USA  
Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission  
Friends of Broward Detainees  
Fuerza Del Valle Workers' Center  
Futures Without Violence  
Gainesville (Florida) Interfaith Alliance for Immigrant Justice  
Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights  
GetEQUAL Action  
Global Justice Institute  
Guatemalan Maya Center  
Human Development Resources of Westchester  
Humane Borders  
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights  
Immigrant Detainee Accompaniment Program  
Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project  
Immigrant Survivors Legal Assistance  
Immigration Center for Women and Children  
Inland Empire Immigrant Youth Coalition  
Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights (CLUE-CA)  
International Association of Forensic Nurses  
Jewish Women International  
Jesuit Social Research Institute – Loyola University New Orleans  
Justice Strategies

Kentucky Equal Justice Center  
Korean Community Center of the East Bay  
La Raza Centro Legal  
Latino Coalition for a Healthy California (LCHC)  
Latinas Educating and Empowering Communities  
Maxwell Street Legal Clinic  
Metropolitan Community Churches  
New York Legal Assistance Group  
North American Dominican Justice Promoters  
North California Coalition of Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking  
North Carolina Immigrant Rights Project  
Northwest Health Law Advocates  
Northwest Immigrant Rights Project  
Oklahoma Policy Institute  
OneAmerica  
Out4Immigration  
Pacific Islander Cancer Survivor Network  
Pax Christi USA  
Peace Action  
Pennsylvania Council of Churches  
Public Counsel  
Public Justice Center  
Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities Coalition  
Research Action Design (RAD)  
Rural Women's Health Project  
Service Employees International Union Local 87  
Services, Immigrant Rights, and Education Network (SIREN)  
SHARE El Salvador  
Shem Center for Interfaith Spirituality  
Sistas and Brothas United  
Sisters of Good Shepherd, New York  
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas  
Sisters of St. Joseph-Baden  
Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester  
Social Justice Collaborative  
South Texas Civil Rights Project  
Street Level Health Project  
Students Working for Equal Rights  
Texas Appleseed  
The Voices and Faces Project  
TODEC Legal Center  
Transgender Law Center  
Tulsa Metropolitan Ministry  
University of California, Davis School of Law Immigration Law Clinic  
University of Miami School of Law, Immigration Clinic  
United Families

United Methodist Women  
Vermont Immigration and Asylum Advocates  
Victim Rights Law Center  
Virginia Coalition for Latino Organizations  
Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy  
Voices for Utah Children  
We Own the DREAM  
WeCount!  
Women Against Military Madness  
Women of Color Network  
Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights  
Youth and Young Adult Network of the National Farm Worker Ministry (YAYA-NFWM)  
YWCA of the Greater Capital Region, Inc.

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<sup>i</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Children on the Run: Unaccompanied Children Leaving Central America and Mexico and the need for International Protection*, 13 March 2014, available at:

<http://www.refworld.org/docid/532180c24.html>

<sup>ii</sup> See, e.g. Betsy Cavendish and Maru Cortazar, Appleseed, *Children at the Border: the Screening, Protection and Repatriation of Unaccompanied Mexican Minors* (2011), available at <http://appleseednetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Children-At-The-Border1.pdf>.