

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](mailto: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