

Members of Congress,

Congress has a unique opportunity and challenge as it considers the President's Supplemental Budget Request. The humanitarian crisis of unaccompanied Central American children and families who have been apprehended and detained at the U.S. border has shined a glaring light on the violence, poverty and extreme desperation that people in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras confront daily. In addressing this crisis, we urge Congress to attend to the immediate emergency needs of the children and families at the border while providing resources to address the underlying conditions which are driving them to flee Central America.

We call on policymakers to meet our moral and legal obligations to ensure these children and families are treated humanely and provided all due protections under current law. Many have fled violence, endured arduous journeys, and suffered criminal attacks along the way. Policymakers must ensure that there are sufficient resources to evaluate each case to determine if there are legitimate grounds for asylum, trafficking victims' protection, or other forms of humanitarian relief. Providing due process and access to the justice system are key to our national character, even in the face of political pressure.

Many of these children and families from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala are leaving desperate 'flee or die' situations, and come to the United States to escape violence, intimidation, corrupt police, and forced recruitment into street gangs. Central American governments have been unable or unwilling to protect children and families, or control rising levels of violence due to weak judicial systems, and corruption and abuse within security forces and legal institutions.

We urge Congress to support programs that address the underlying drivers of their flight—violence and poverty in Central America. Any sustainable strategy for the humanitarian border crisis must address the chronic challenges in Central America that prevent people from living safe, prosperous lives in their home country.

The U.S. and other bilateral and multilateral donors should support development that promotes fairly shared economic growth and accountable justice systems. These investments should include repatriation and development programs that prioritize youth education and job training, agricultural development focused on smallholder farmers, and other food security and nutrition programs that increase economic productivity. They should include programs that prevent youth violence, demobilize youth forcibly recruited into gangs, increase child protection, and provide shelters for girls and women who have suffered violence and sexual exploitation. Our government should help strengthen judicial systems and invest in accountable community policing. However, the U.S. government must avoid funding police institutions that have failed to reform corrupt or abusive practices, and should not fund the military for policing. The U.S. should also promote fiscal reforms that strengthen national and local governments' ability to invest in their own security and economic development.

As Congress considers the supplemental request, it is essential that border militarization and deporting vulnerable children not be prioritized above humanitarian needs and legal obligations. This is a complex crisis and human tragedy that demands a response to both immediate needs and longstanding causes. We call on policymakers to support the humane treatment of these children and families and ensure their legal claims are evaluated fairly. We encourage Congress to address the root causes by investing in violence prevention, criminal justice reform, and development that will help stabilize communities and expand opportunities for the young people of Central America.

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Bread for the World
National Council of Churches, USA
Jesuit Conference USA
Women's Refugee Commission
Franciscan Action Network
International Rescue Committee (IRC)
Latin America Working Group (LAWG)
Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA
Jesuit Refugee Service/USA (JRS)
World Vision
Alliance of Baptists
Church World Service (CWS)
United Methodist Church,
General Board of Church and Society
National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW)

Leadership Conference of Women Religious
National Immigration Law Center (NILC)
Coalition on Human Needs (CHN)
Women Thrive Worldwide
Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)
Pax Christi USA
World Learning
World Food Program USA
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Friends Committee on National Legislation
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Cuban American Alliance
RFK Center for Justice & Human Rights
Peace Action & Peace Action Education Fund
Quixote Center

Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach
Sisters and Brother of Immigrants, Inc.
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Arkansas Interfaith Alliance
Center for International Policy (CIP)
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ZERO TO THREE
Church of the Brethren
United Church of Christ,
Justice and Witness Ministries (UCC)
American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)
Sister Parish, Inc.
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