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[People's Lives Are Not a Bargaining Chip](#)
[WWD Partners Call Out Inhumane Trade Between Aid Package, Asylum System Overhaul](#)

Washington, D.C. – The [#WelcomewithDignity campaign](#) is calling on members of Congress to reject attempts to broker a deal to pass aid for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan in exchange for permanent changes to dramatically curtail access to asylum. With a Senate vote expected as early as next week, we call on all senators to safeguard asylum.

While prior anti-immigrant proposals were rejected by many Senate and House Democrats, it is alarming that lawmakers are once again considering trading key asylum and parole protections for foreign aid. The asylum system must be rebuilt, not dismantled. The fundamental right to seek asylum must be protected. That is true aid and humanity.

We are heartened by Senator Padilla and ten other Senators' [statement](#) expressing concerns over this proposal. The #WelcomewithDignity campaign continues to denounce any efforts to deny or limit access to asylum and urges Congress to halt these efforts.

“Emergency funding should not come at the expense of others who need help themselves to escape persecution and violence,” said **Melina Roche, #WelcomeWithDignity Campaign Manager**. “Changes to the life-saving asylum protections in a funding bill are unacceptable. We must all stand against policies that try to instill fear and strip individuals and families of their fundamental right to seek asylum that would only sow chaos at the border.”

“These radical proposals amount to a complete abandonment of the U.S. government’s legal and moral [obligations](#) to extend protection to refugees fleeing persecution,” said **Karen Musalo, Director of the Center for Gender & Refugee Studies (CGRS)**. “In practice, they would result in the persecution, torture, and deaths of families, children, and adults seeking safe haven at our nation’s doorstep. It is utterly shameful that Republican lawmakers are attempting to exploit the budget negotiations process to advance an extremist, anti-immigrant and anti-refugee agenda. The lives of people seeking asylum are not political bargaining chips. We urge lawmakers to join [Senator Padilla](#) and other congressional leaders in rejecting these cynical proposals.”

“Using a one-time spending package to permanently gut our asylum system sets a dangerous precedent and undermines our nation’s values, laws, and commitment to protect those seeking safety,” said **Sarah Mehta, senior policy counsel at the American Civil Liberties Union**. “Restrictive anti-asylum policies do nothing to keep our country safer – instead, they have caused needless suffering and death, and have only created further confusion and disorder at the border. As

negotiations continue, we need our elected leaders to show moral courage and reject extremist anti-immigrant policies.”

“We are frustrated that some in Congress are again seeking to hold human rights hostage to advance their agenda,” said **Michele Garnett McKenzie, Deputy Director of The Advocates for Human Rights**. “Human rights are not chips to be bartered for political ends; they are basic guarantees to human dignity that must not be traded away. Efforts to erode our asylum system will inflict lasting and serious human harms while failing to address real areas for meaningful immigration reform. People move, and the United States must ensure our laws provide safe, orderly, and fair pathways to migration if we want to protect human dignity, support business needs for migration, and uphold national security. Closing avenues to safely seek asylum will not stop people from seeking safety.”

“The right to seek asylum is a life-saving protection that should not be subject to negotiation. We strongly oppose any proposals to limit or reduce access to asylum or parole, especially during times when people seeking refuge need protection the most,” said **Jennifer Babaie, Director of Advocacy and Legal Services at Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center in El Paso, Texas, Ciudad Juárez and New Mexico**. “We know that when politicians use immigrant children and families as political props — real people get hurt. There is a face, a name, a story, to every person caught in the ongoing political crossfire. Addressing the humanitarian crisis at the border calls for real, comprehensive, and humane solutions. If we work together instead of being divided and distracted by false narratives, we can create a immigration system that provides access to safety for all.”

“It is unconscionable that lawmakers are considering trading away refugee protections long enshrined in U.S. law,” said **Katharina Obser, Director of the Migrant Rights and Justice program at the Women’s Refugee Commission**. “Despite what lawmakers suggest, restrictions to asylum and parole do not deter migration and will only increase chaos at the southern border. Today, with an asylum ban in place and nearly 40,000 people jailed in immigration detention, people still come to the United States in search of safety because they have no other choice. Foreign aid cannot come at the expense of dismantling the U.S. asylum system. Instead of such deals, lawmakers should turn to proven measures — such as resourcing asylum processing and the communities that work with those seeking asylum — that ensure that our asylum system is resourced, fair, and humane.”

“Immigration law and policy, especially in the context of their impact on human lives, deserve to be considered on their own,” said **Karen Tumlin, Founder and Director of Justice Action Center**. “It is ethically and legally repugnant that certain lawmakers are attempting to permanently decimate basic protections and longstanding cornerstones of U.S. immigration policy, including the right to seek asylum and the 70+ year old humanitarian parole authority, as conditions for passing funding packages around foreign aid. The right to seek asylum, one of the most basic rights enshrined in domestic and international law, is non-negotiable.”

“These proposals are a non-starter,” said **Casey Carter Swegman, Director of Public Policy at the Tahirih Justice Center**. “The deterrence-based proposals on the table would make it practically impossible to apply for and receive asylum in the U.S. and have no place in negotiations about an aid package. Such policies would uniquely harm immigrant survivors of gender-based violence who face increased risk of re-victimization on their perilous journey to the U.S. and every day they are forced to wait to access safety and justice. Congress must swiftly reject any attempts to condition the success of a funding package on harmful anti-immigrant policy proposals and attacks on asylum.”

“Trading fundamental human rights protections for a one-time supplemental funding request is unconscionable, outrageous, and fundamentally misguided,” said **Sunil Varghese, Policy Director at the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP)**. “The long-term result from such short-sighted extremist policy will be further chaos at the southern border and further loss of life and human dignity. Instead of appeasing the xenophobia of the far right, the Biden Administration and Senate Democrats should be working to make the United States more welcoming, not more hateful.”

“If this proposed deal goes through, thousands of refugees fleeing for their lives will be returned to their home countries to once again face persecution and death. Many will die,” said **Priscilla Orta, Supervising Attorney of Project Corazon at Lawyers for Good Government**. “These changes to asylum law would violate our international obligations and decimate decades-old immigration laws that were passed with almost unanimous support. We categorically oppose any attempts to build even higher barriers to asylum, and reject Trump-like attempts to dismantle our asylum system. We are better than this.”

“The U.S. government needs to strengthen its outdated asylum system, not play Russian roulette with people’s lives,” said **Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) President Carolina Jiménez Sandoval**. “U.S. immigration courts decided 71,000 asylum cases in 2023, and granted asylum or other protection in 49 percent of them. That means the courts identified nearly 35,000 people who would have faced imminent risks of death, torture, or imprisonment had the United States deported them. This is a huge argument for due process in a sound asylum system—not for placing new obstacles in the way of protection. Meanwhile, the current system is gravely under-resourced: U.S. immigration courts have 659 judges to handle a backlog of nearly 2.2 million cases.”

“Republicans are using bullying tactics in an attempt to dismantle humanitarian programs that protect the most vulnerable among us. Democrats must stand with asylum seekers, immigrants, and their loved ones in the United States by rejecting these cruel and inhumane Senate GOP demands,” said **Margaret Cargioli, Directing Attorney of Policy and Advocacy at Immigrant Defenders Law Center**. “We need Congress to stop the evisceration of our asylum system and instead work to pass immigration reform that provides protection to vulnerable asylum seekers, including thousands of children.”

“Oxfam strongly urges the Senate to reject extreme immigration demands that gut access to asylum and harm people seeking safety in exchange for unrelated emergency supplemental funding,” said **Gina Cummings, Vice President of Advocacy, Alliances & Policy at Oxfam America**. “The \$10 billion that President Biden is requesting for humanitarian assistance is sorely needed – it will save the lives of millions of the world’s most vulnerable people. But we cannot pay for the lives of people abroad by sacrificing the lives, dignity, and rights of people arriving at our border – or the values we have always aspired to as a nation.

“To attempt to trade the rights of vulnerable populations in ongoing funding negotiations is morally reprehensible, and undermines the values that our country claims to hold dear,” said **Danilo Zak, Associate Director of Policy and Advocacy at Church World Service**. “Ongoing negotiations should be about funding the government and supporting those in need, not embedding anti-immigrant, anti-family provisions into statute. Rather than continuing to use their time and position to take from the most vulnerable, members of Congress should focus on humane solutions to promises that have been left unkept. There is still a troubling gap in basic services for Ukrainian and Afghan humanitarian parolees who arrived after September 30th; these individuals and families have been suddenly cut off from support – placing those we pledged to protect at risk. Over 80 refugee advocacy organizations have called for these benefits to be reauthorized, and

have spoken out in support of refugee funding needs and against the incorporation of anti-asylum policies. With growing displacement around the world, we must invest in our capacity to welcome the most vulnerable. It is past time for Congress to stop pursuing fruitless and harmful avenues, and instead listen to those they vowed to represent.”

“We urge Congress to reject any and all attempts to use the human right to asylum as a bargaining tool,” said **Quixote Center Executive Director Kim Lamberty**. “Human lives are not disposable. Our partners at migrant shelters in Southern Mexico and Panama are witnessing the growing confusion and desperation unfold as a result of new restrictions such as the asylum ban and CBP One. Destroying life-saving asylum protections will not alleviate the humanitarian crisis in our southern border; it will only subject people fleeing danger to even more suffering and chaos. Instead, we urge Congress to expand lawful pathways and expedite access to work permits so that all our communities can thrive.”

“Increasingly restrictive asylum policies endanger the lives of newly arrived migrants seeking protection by fomenting uncertainty and chaos,” said **Monika Langarica, Senior Staff Attorney at the Center for Immigration Law and Policy (CILP) at the UCLA School of Law**. “Any proposal that seeks to strip away the most basic asylum protections flagrantly disregards international law, and threatens to pulverize an already crumbling system for those fleeing persecution and torture. We need to expand safe and viable humanitarian pathways, not further restrict them.”

“We must restore and protect access to safety at our border and ensure humane treatment and welcoming policies,” said **Imani Cruz, Global Policy Coordinator for Migration Justice at the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)**. “Additional funding for armed conflict, that will inevitably cause more people to seek safety as refugees/asylum seekers, cannot be traded for effectively ending asylum in the U.S. Constituents and advocates – for both migrant communities and global peace – overwhelmingly support funding to slow climate change, provide food and housing security, and expand access to healthcare NOT promoting conflict and harm at home and abroad.”

“The proposed changes to immigration policy being used as bargaining chips in current negotiations are unacceptable,” said **Cindy Woods, National Policy Counsel at Americans for Immigrant Justice**. “While it is undeniable that thoughtful immigration reform—which takes into account the realities of individuals fleeing their homes in search of safety and the longstanding failure of deterrence-based policies—is needed, ceding to these extremely harmful policy shifts in order to secure funding for unrelated foreign policy objectives will do nothing but create more chaos at the border and harm vulnerable populations.”

“Trading fundamental policies that provide protections to peoples seeking refuge is unconscionable and outrageous,” said **Ronnate Asirwatham, Director, Government Relations, NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice**. “The Senate trying to gut our nation’s asylum laws permanently through backroom deals, is going to result in causing chaos and further loss of life and human dignity. Instead of appeasing political extremists, the Biden Administration and the Senate need to uphold American values.”

“Our elected leaders should reject any attempts to trade on the lives of people seeking asylum during emergency funding negotiations,” said **Robyn Barnard, Director of Refugee Protection, Human Rights First**. “Congress enacted our refugee protection laws on an almost unanimous basis

decades ago and they have served as a lifeline. They must be protected and we urge Senators to hold true to our values in ensuring they are not undermined.”