



May 16, 2016

Dear President Obama:

The Steering Committee of the National Taskforce to End Sexual and Domestic Violence (NTF) comprises national leadership organizations advocating on behalf of sexual and domestic violence victims and women's rights. We represent hundreds of programs, service providers and community organizations across the country dedicated to making sure that **all** survivors of violence receive the protections and services they need and deserve. With the announcement<sup>1</sup> that the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has relaunched raids against Central American mothers and children who have fled to the U.S. to escape violence and abuse, **we again, urge you to stop the raids and ensure the Administration is not returning refugees to further abuse or even their death.**

The NTF remains concerned that families and children targeted for deportation have valid claims to humanitarian protection here in the United States, but have been unable to successfully navigate a system that is stacked against them. Though the administration states that it is targeting cases in which individuals have exhausted their legal claims, the reality is that many families and children lack adequate legal representation or adequate notice of a court date.<sup>2</sup> Lack of legal representation is the single most important factor in predicting success in a request for asylum, and those individuals targeted in raids are often those who performed poorly in hearings due to lack of legal representation. Moreover, lack of trauma-informed individuals and methods for conducting reasonable fear interviews of women who have suffered severe trauma often make potential candidates for refugee status fall through the cracks.

**Further, the Central American countries from which these families and children escaped remain extremely dangerous.** Deportation will result in more domestic violence, sexual abuse, or even death. Prolonged domestic violence and sexual assault without government redress is a primary reason for flight. According to a recent United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) study, on Northern Triangle women seeking asylum in the United States, prolonged instances of physical, sexual and psychological abuse in the home are common reasons for flight. In addition, in recent years, the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador and Honduras have alternated in ranking as the murder capital of the world, and all three countries have ranked within the world's top countries for femicide rates. The Northern Triangle countries have areas that are highly controlled by gangs, and women are often coerced into joining. A woman's duty to gang members is to "provide" sex for the members, and initiation rituals for women frequently consist of being sexually assaulted on a regular basis.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-deportation-exclusive-idUSKCN0Y32J1?>

<sup>2</sup> <http://trac.syr.edu/immigration/reports/377/>

**Raids generate fear and panic, further pushing victims into the shadows.** The fear and panic the raids provoke will continue to discourage immigrant survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and trafficking from reporting any abuse to law enforcement and other government agencies. As a result, traffickers and abusers will go undetected and will not be made accountable for their actions.

**We Urge You to Stop the Raids.** Make our communities safer by gaining the trust of the immigrant community, not by pushing them further into the shadows. Furthermore, survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and trafficking should not be further endangered based on their inability to access justice or in hopes of deterring others from escaping life-threatening circumstances in search of safety and hope. For more information, please contact Grace Huang, Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence, at [ghuang@api-gbv.org](mailto:ghuang@api-gbv.org) or Pierre Berastain of Casa de Esperanza, at [pberastain@casadeesperanza.org](mailto:pberastain@casadeesperanza.org). Thank you.

Sincerely,

The National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence

CC:

Cecilia Muñoz, Assistant to the President and Director of the Domestic Policy Council

Felicia Escobar, Senior Policy Advisor

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