



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MN Congressional Delegation Urged to Ensure Protection of Children Fleeing Violence in Central America *Broad coalition of advocates, labor, faith leaders join letter calling for U.S. to retain child screening protocols*

Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN (07/16/14) – Dozens of Minnesota organizations and faith leaders have called upon Minnesota’s congressional delegation to resist efforts to undermine protocols protecting children seeking safety from persecution and human trafficking.

In a letter signed by an array of Minnesota’s leading children’s, women’s, faith-based, labor, and immigrant rights organizations (*a complete list is detailed below*), the group called on every Minnesota U.S. senator and representative to oppose any plan to weaken the protections afforded to children from Central America and to ensure that the rights and safety of these children are guaranteed.

“Children are fleeing Central America out of fear of persecution and are too often victims of human trafficking,” says Robin Phillips, executive director of The Advocates for Human Rights, “Denying them a reasonable opportunity to articulate their fears violates our obligations under international refugee law.” While adult asylum seekers arriving at U.S. borders must convince U.S. border officials that they have a fear of returning to their home countries or face immediate expulsion under “expedited removal” procedures established in 1996, since 2008 children from non-contiguous countries have been placed in regular removal proceedings where they have an opportunity to articulate their complex protection claims to immigration judges.

These children often remain in detention, and have no right to a government-appointed attorney, notes John Keller, executive director of the Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota. “Expecting a nine-year-old child, on her own, to sit across from an immigration judge and the government’s attorney begs any question of due process,” he says.

Mai Neng Moua, chair of the Minnesota/Dakotas chapter of the American Immigration Lawyers Association, echoed the need for due process, including increased resources for immigration judges charged with adjudicating asylum cases. “As a refugee myself, I know how difficult the journey made by these children has been. America’s immigration system needs to be adequately resourced to ensure that children have access to fair hearings.”

Vic Rosenthal, executive director of Jewish Community Action, notes that “our faith stresses the importance of welcoming the stranger and supporting the family, and compels us to support others in pursuit of better opportunities for their families in a different land. It is long past time for Congress to act and at least take the necessary step to provide reform and aid to assist these vulnerable children.”

“The protection and care of children must be our highest priority during this refugee situation,” echoes Peggy Flanagan, executive director of the Children’s Defense Fund – Minnesota.

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The letter to Minnesota’s U.S. Senators and Congressional delegation can be downloaded at:

<http://bit.ly/UedNEn>

<http://bit.ly/UdlQRA>

Coalition members include:

The Advocates for Human Rights
American Immigration Lawyers Association – Minnesota/Dakotas Chapter
Breaking Free
Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis
Centro Campesino
Children’s Defense Fund - Minnesota
CLUES (Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio-Latino Communities United in Service)
Conversations with Friends (Minnesota’s detained immigrant visitor program)
El Santo Nino Jesus (Hispanic ministry of the, Episcopal Church in Minnesota)
The Family Partnership
Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota
Immigration Team of the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ
Interfaith Coalition on Immigration
ISALAH
ISALAH Core Team, Mayflower Church United Church of Christ, Minneapolis
Jewish Community Action
Latino Communications Network
Latino Voices
League of Latino Educators
The Link
Mesa Latina
Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid
The Minneapolis Foundation
Minneapolis Regional Labor Federation, AFL-CIO
Minnesota AFL-CIO
Minnesota Catholic Conference
Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault
Minnesota Council of Churches
MIRAC (Minnesota Immigrant Rights Action Committee)
NAVIGATE
PAVSA (Program Against Violence and Sexual Assault – Duluth)
Pillsbury United Communities
Saint Joan of Arc Catholic Community
Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation
SEIU Minnesota State Council
UFCW 1189
West Area Labor Council Minnesota AFL-CIO
Women’s Foundation of Minnesota

Individual Faith & Religious Leaders:

Bishop Thomas M. Aitken, NE MN Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Duluth
Bishop Bruce R. Ough, Dakotas-Minnesota Area, The United Methodist Church
The Rev. Susan M. Moss, Episcopal Diocese of MN
Rev. Paul Erickson, Assistant to the Bishop for Evangelical Mission, St. Paul Synod, ELCA
Rev. Mark Kuether, The Congregational United Church of Christ, Detroit Lakes
Rev. Wendy Jerome, Unitarian Universalist
Revs. Patrick & Luisa Cabello Hansel, Pastors, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Mpls.
Rev. Sharon Prestemon, Conference Minister, Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ
Rev. John R. Guttermann, Covenant Minister, United Church of Christ, New Brighton MN
Steve Clemens, Community of St. Martin, Minneapolis
Pastor Jay M. Carlson, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Minneapolis
Bob Oehrig, Executive Director, Arrive Ministries
Rev. Sarah Campbell, Team Lead Minister Mayflower Church, United Church of Christ
Rev. Emily Goldthwaite Fries, Associate Minister, Mayflower Church, United Church of Christ

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About The Advocates for Human Rights

For more than 30 years, The Advocates for Human Rights has promoted and protected human rights here at home and around the world. The non-profit organization, based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, documents human rights abuses, advocates on behalf of individual victims, provides free legal representation to people seeking asylum, works to prevent violence against women and girls, spearheads public policy and legal change, educates about human rights issues, and provides training and technical assistance to address and prevent human rights violations.