

March 26, 2015

Honorable Barack H. Obama
President
United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Mr. President:

As faith leaders representing churches, synagogues, and faith-based organizations in the United States who are deeply committed to upholding this country's moral leadership to protect children and the sanctity of the family, we call on you to end the harsh policy of family detention and employ alternatives to detention where deemed necessary. We believe this practice to be inhumane and harmful to the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of this vulnerable population.

We also believe that it is inappropriate and unjust to seek to deter anyone, especially a woman and her children, from fleeing violence in their homeland to seek safe haven in the United States. A recent decision by the U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., which issued an injunction halting the detention of families, agreed with this assessment, concluding that a strategy of deterrence does not warrant the deprivation of individual liberty.

As people of faith, we are guided by admonitions to care for and protect children. Studies have shown that detention has a harmful psychological effect on children, in which they grow despondent, lose weight, and do not advance in their intellectual or emotional growth. Detention also undermines family bonds and parental authority. Moreover, children and their parent(s) have already experienced trauma on their journey, with many of the women having endured sexual violence. Placing survivors of violence in detention only adds to their trauma and sense of insecurity. It also subjects them to possible further emotional or physical abuse.

These families are not a threat to our communities—they pose no risk to our safety and have committed no crimes. They are themselves fleeing real forms of terror, with a majority having valid asylum claims. While in detention they have less ability to access counsel to help them with their claims, leaving them without due process protections. Their detention also hinders the ability to gather evidence of their persecution, diminishing their chances of obtaining protection.

Instead of incarcerating these vulnerable families, we urge you to reconsider the need to detain them and release them on their recognizance or explore other alternatives, such as placement in a community-based case management program.

Mr. President, detaining mothers and babies who come to this country in search of refuge from violence and abuse is morally troubling. The Bible is very clear—we are called to welcome the stranger. We ask you to consider whether you are prepared for your legacy to include the

purposeful detention of innocent mothers and babies in furthering an ineffective policy of deterrence that violates fundamental tenants of our faiths and the American ideal of providing freedom and refuge to the persecuted. The incarceration of vulnerable mothers and children fleeing violence in their home countries is a stain on the record of this Administration.

We urge you to reverse course on this policy and implement alternatives for all families in immigration detention which are humane and uphold the human rights of this vulnerable population. Our faith communities are ready and willing to welcome and assist families seeking refuge.

Sincerely,

U.S. Catholic Bishops

Most Reverend Gustavo Garcia-Siller
Archbishop of San Antonio, Texas

Most Reverend Thomas Wenski
Archbishop of Miami, FL

Most Reverend Nicholas DiMarzio
Bishop of Brooklyn, NY

Most Reverend Eusebio Elizondo
Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle, WA

Most Reverend Gerald Kicanas
Bishop of Tucson, AZ

Most Reverend Mark Seitz
Bishop of El Paso, Texas

Most Reverend Jaime Soto
Bishop of Sacramento, CA

Most Reverend James Tamayo
Bishop of Laredo, Texas

Most Reverend Anthony B. Taylor
Bishop of Little Rock, AR

Most Reverend John C. Wester
Bishop of Salt Lake City, UT

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Bishop Abraham Allende, Northeastern
Ohio Synod, ELCA

Bishop Jon Anderson, Southwestern
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Bishop Jim Arends, La Crosse Area Synod,
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Bishop Terry Brandt, Eastern North Dakota
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Bishop Murray D. Finck, Pacifica Synod,
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Bishop Mary Froiland, South-Central Synod
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Bishop Mark Holmerud, Sierra Pacific
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Bishop Brian Maas, Nebraska Synod, ELCA

Bishop John Macholtz, Upstate New York
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Bishop Gerald Mansholt, Central Synod of
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Bishop James Mauney, Virginia Synod,
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Bishop Lawrence R. Wohlrabe,
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Bishop Gary Wollersheim, Northern Illinois
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Bishop Herman Yoos, South Carolina
Synod, ELCA

Bishop David B Zellmer, South Dakota
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Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod

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Rev. Dr. Larry Stoterau, President, Pacific
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National Hispanic Evangelical Coalition

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Jewish Leaders

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Rabbi Eli Freedman

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