

February 2, 2016

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

As leaders in the faith community, we the undersigned, write to express our opposition to the current immoral and unjust ICE raids, as ordered by your administration and carried out by Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson and Immigration and Customs Enforcement Director Sarah Saldaña. In this season when many of our faith communities have been focused on remembering the flight of Jesus' family to Egypt to escape the terrors of violence and persecution under Herod, we are deeply disturbed that recent raids have been especially targeting Central American mothers and children seeking protection from increasingly dangerous environments.

Today, as thousands of men, women, and children flee unimaginable violence, persecution, and poverty from Central America and around the world, we continue to pray for our nation to stand ready to welcome them with safety and protection. We remain committed through our faith partnerships to continue to address the root causes of gang and drug violence, human trafficking, extreme poverty, armed conflict, and gender-based and domestic abuse which force children and family members to flee their homelands--and we continue to seek your partnership, and the partnership of Congress, in improving the deteriorating conditions in the region. In the meantime, however, we reiterate that the detention and deportation of families who are seeking asylum are not the answers to persons seeking to escape from violence. As a nation of immigrants, African descendants, and indigenous people, and as people of faith, practices shown in the raids of recent weeks are not representative of our values.

For years, we have seen how immigration raids have terrorized our communities and congregations across the United States. Time and time again, immigration policies targeting the most vulnerable among us have separated families, torn apart communities, and deported people back to unimaginable violence and persecution. Living out our faith's call to welcome the stranger and stand with the vulnerable, congregations across the United States have opened their doors to offer sanctuary to those seeking to fight their deportation. We seek your assurance that places of worship will remain safe and sacred spaces where all families can engage in their respective faith traditions without fear of harassment or monitoring by immigration officials. Yet, while the faith act of offering sanctuary has prevented some individuals from being torn away from their communities and returned to the circumstances they are fleeing, it is not a permanent solution to our nation's immoral and outdated immigration policies.

To fully address the needs of our immigrant communities, we call upon your administration to recognize and enforce both international and domestic humanitarian and asylum agreements, granting safety to many targeted by recent ICE raids and held in immigration detention facilities. Recent data from [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services](#) show that over 88 percent of those held in detention facilities have verifiable claims for asylum. In this context, our country's national and international commitments to offer access to asylum, and our faith values of mercy

and relief, must prevail over deportations that send children back--often at risk for their lives--to the violence, and persecution from which they originally fled.

Together, representing our various faiths and congregations, we decry the use of any policy or action that would further terrorize or separate families seeking safety. Such actions have no place in our response to the humanitarian crisis in Central America. We ask that you immediately end the raids conducted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement and order a review of all asylum cases for those fleeing from Central America, providing them with their full and fair day in court as ordered by our Constitution.

Refugees and immigrants offer multiple assets to our country. They are powerful ambassadors of the American Dream and our nation's founding principles of equal opportunity, freedom to live in peace and safety, and liberty and justice for all. As people of faith, our values call us to welcome the stranger, love our neighbor, and stand with the vulnerable, especially in times of great crisis. We pray that in your discernment, fresh compassion for the plight of men, women, and children fleeing violence and persecution in Central America will touch your heart. We urge you to uphold our nation's international commitments to offer asylum and to be bold in choosing moral, just policies that would finally provide safety for all who seek protection and a chance at hope for the most vulnerable among us.

Sincerely,