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## **Faith Leaders Voice Staunch Support for Asylum Seekers, Urge President to Uphold Protections for Vulnerable Families and Individuals**

**Washington, D.C.** - President Trump is expected to announce later today an executive order to turn away families fleeing violence in Central America and block access to asylum, as the caravan of people seeking protection continues on their long journey to the United States. These families are fleeing violence, desperation, and persecution and are traveling together for safety on their dangerous journey. Blocking vulnerable people fleeing violence and persecution from accessing protection is a violation of international law. It is also immoral, cruel and unnecessary.

**Faith leaders issued the following statements in support of vulnerable families and individuals seeking asylum at our border:**

"A dark moment in our history as a nation was when we turned away the MS St. Louis carrying 900 Jewish families seeking asylum and returned them to the horrors of the Holocaust. Today, asylum protections offer a last hope for people facing life-threatening conditions. CWS and faith communities across the country demand the administration uphold our moral and legal obligations to welcome people seeking protection." **Rev. John L. McCullough, President and CEO of CWS**

"We have heard the powerful testimonies of the Central American refugees fleeing unspeakable violence in their countries, and we stand in solidarity with those currently making their way through southern Mexico. The misleading information about them, as well as the fear-mongering being promoted by the Trump administration and its allies, comes days before the midterm elections. Until we address the root causes, and acknowledge how decades of failed U.S. foreign policies have contributed to the unraveling of the economic and social fabric in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, people in the U.S. will continue to be subject to manipulation by misused power." **Sister Patricia McDermott, RSM, President, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas**

"Trump's immoral call to send military personnel instead of material aid to meet this caravan of mostly Honduran migrants heading north is a clear example of how this Administration lacks empathy for victims of poverty and torture. As the nation is transfixed on this humanitarian plea, we can use this as a teachable moment, where lives are on the line, to show support for the rights of all asylum seekers. The President should learn from the example of the faith community in welcoming immigrants, instead of stoking fear and division." **The Rev. Ron Stief, Executive Director of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture**

"I personally witnessed the courage and desperation of the people in Central America when I traveled to Honduras earlier this year to stand in solidarity with the people of Honduras as they protested an election marked by fraud. The men, women and children braving the caravan heading for the United States are seeking safety and better life. It is our duty and moral imperative to protect and welcome our brothers and sisters, and in our ever evolving, interconnected world, the exclusion of people has no place," said **Lawrence E. Couch, director of the National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.**

"Franciscans witness to a genuine love and respect for the poor and vulnerable. Guided by this deeply held value, we believe every human person has dignity and the right to seek refuge when threatened with danger. Having seen first-hand the suffering and fear the Honduran people endure daily, we feel it is our moral duty to welcome and protect the asylum seekers in the migrant caravan who simply seek a safe place to live and raise their kids. To turn them away at our border would be inhumane." said **Patrick Carolan, Executive Director of Franciscan Action Network**

“Each day as the migrant caravan makes its way to the United States border, our moral responsibility to respond increases. Will we be a people of bold love and compassion or a people paralyzed by fear? As faith leaders we must lead beyond our fears, and teach those we lead to do the same. Thousands of vulnerable people, seeking asylum protection deserve the opportunity to make their case and seek safety.

“The significant numbers of migrants coming North clearly shows that issues driving people from their homes goes well beyond closing our borders. We must be willing to seek solutions that address the root causes of this migration. The faith community should not only be leading in the accompaniment and direct services of those in need but prophetically calling our administration to steer clear of false derogatory narratives that engender fear and hatred towards migrants uprooting their lives to seek asylum.

“It is our Christian responsibility, not only to welcome the stranger and to offer hospitality to those seeking safety in our country, but to fully engage in addressing the root causes of our nation’s immigration crisis.” **Rev. Dr. Noel Castellanos, President Christian Community Development Association**

“At CLINIC, we are guided by the tenets of Catholic Social Teaching and the laws of the United States. Seeking asylum is not illegal. Whether we study our theology or our law books, we come to the same conclusion: turning away asylum seekers is wrong. We should not be afraid of those reaching out to us for help. We walk side by side with those seeking asylum and expect our government to uphold the laws and international principles that are the bedrock of America.” **Jeanne Atkinson, executive director of the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.**

“For too long, the U.S. government has fueled violence and economic displacement in Central America that have caused an exodus of refugees. There can be no more shameful response to this legacy than to shutter our borders and betray international and U.S. law by denying the right to asylum to those who have tasted the bitter fruit of these policies. At UUSC, we take our inspiration from the Unitarian Universalist principle that every person has inherent worth and dignity. When people defy persecution and injustice by seeking asylum across borders, they are defending the human rights and dignity that we all would wish for ourselves and our loved ones. Refugees, migrants, and asylum-seekers are not a threat; they are a spiritual gift to a nation that has too often lost sight of its own humanity.” **Rev. Mary Katherine Morn, President and CEO, Unitarian Universalist Service Committee**

“We cannot see the movement of migrants seeking hope in this time without claiming the powerful bonds they share with the central heritage of our faith. Like the Israelites fleeing Pharaoh in the wilderness under Moses in Exodus 13 & 14, families now also move quickly, in groups for protection against dangers, and without many resources. Communities now are likewise often deeply faithful, and trust the strong hand of God to lead them as they escape from unjust economic and work conditions and navigate through harsh deserts, across waters, and away from violence. Our opportunity is to demonstrate to migrants that ‘the Lord will fight for you’ (Ex. 14:14) by offering the presence of God through welcome and healing—not punitive pushbacks—as they pursue potential protection offered through our nation’s and international asylum laws, and as we seek solutions to root causes of violence against them.” **Rev. Teresa “Terri” Hord Owens, General Minister & President, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the U.S. & Canada**

“On my trip to the US Mexico border in August, I saw first-hand the perils asylum seekers face on their journey, and the hope and determination they share to build better lives for themselves and their families. To close our borders would not only be a violation of our international commitments, but a transgression on our nation’s soul. Our Jewish history and values teach that all people are deserving of safety and dignity, regardless of their immigration status.” - **Nancy K. Kaufman, CEO National Council of Jewish Women**

“The Leadership Conference of Women Religious is deeply troubled by President Trump’s continued denigration of those fleeing untenable situations in their home countries. We reject the president’s rhetoric of fear and policy of division that poisons our politics. We choose instead to stand with Pope Francis who calls us to ‘promote the dignity of all our brothers and sisters, particularly the poor and the excluded of society, those who are abandoned, immigrants and those who suffer violence and human trafficking.’ Women religious have been blessed to be able to accompany and serve migrant communities across this country for a very long time. We will continue to welcome them at the border

and in our communities.” **Carol Zinn, SSJ, Executive Director, Leadership Conference of Women Religious**

“I have watched with great compassion the caravan of asylum seekers marching north through Mexico in search of safety. I fail to comprehend how the most powerful government on Earth sees these humble, vulnerable families as a threat. That we are now preparing armed soldiers with riot gear to become their welcoming party sickens and saddens me. Where is the America I once knew as a child – whose monument to the world’s tempest-tossed lit the golden lamp to enlighten their pathway to freedom and a better life? My faith, my sacred texts, my Jesus all compel me to speak out on behalf of these precious people and to call America to open our hearts to them and receive with tender care.” **The Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer, General Minister and President; The United Church of Christ**

“As a Society that serves marginalized communities in countries plagued by poverty and conflict, we see how these conditions drive people to migrate away from their homes in search of security and safety. We believe we are called to serve the needs of migrants and refugees everywhere and address the root causes of migration so people have the choice to remain at home. The administration’s attempts to restrict access to protection, including through preventing members of the migrant caravan from seeking asylum, stand in direct opposition to this sacred obligation.

“The administration should instead look to the faith communities along the border that continue to provide, assistance, care, and support to those who have suffered so much in their efforts to protect and provide for their families. As Columbans and members of border communities, we consider it a blessing and opportunity to support those coming to the United States seeking safety. We believe our federal policy should reflect the same welcome that border communities themselves show, and abstain from inhumane attempts to militarize our border and deny people the opportunity to apply for asylum.” **Scott Wright, Director, Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach**

“The right to asylum is a matter of faith; Mary and Joseph took their child and fled to Egypt in order to escape the murderous rampages of King Herod. Were the Christ child to be born in contemporary Honduras, however, the Holy Family would be met at the U.S. border by troops with orders to keep them out. Asylum seekers have internationally recognized rights. Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.” Denying those fleeing from violence and poverty the opportunity even to state their case to the proper authorities is contrary to faith and a denial of what is best in America, the nation that proclaims to be founded on “inalienable rights” and which proclaims “liberty and justice for all.”

**Rev. Dr. James Moos, Associate General Minister, Global Engagement & Operations UCC; Co-Executive, Global Ministries**

“I’m concerned when I don’t hear other religious leaders standing up for immigrants in our country being treated with justice and decency. I’m concerned when I don’t hear Christian leaders advocating vociferously for the re-unification of parents and children at our borders. I’m concerned when I don’t hear religious leaders advocating for children to be number one on the social agenda of this country. I’m concerned when I hear silence from religious leaders after the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazis marched through the streets of Charlottesville. I’m not hearing Jesus of Nazareth when I hear that silence. We as Christian leaders must speak up and bear witness to the values that we hold based on the teachings of Jesus. And when we fail to do so, we’ve failed to represent the Christian faith in the public sphere.” **Presiding Bishop Michael B. Curry, Episcopal Church**

*The Interfaith Immigration Coalition is made up of nearly 50 national, faith-based organizations brought together across many theological traditions with a common call to seek just policies that lift up the God-given dignity of every individual. In partnership, IIC works to protect the rights, dignity, and safety of all refugees and migrants.*

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