

Jewish Statement on Unaccompanied Children at the U.S.-Mexico Border

July 7, 2014

As organizations deeply rooted in Jewish values, we support policies that promote human rights, ensure the protection of children, and fulfill the Torah's mandate to 'welcome the stranger.' As such, we are very concerned about the urgent humanitarian crisis on the U.S.-Mexico border. Migration of vulnerable children and others from the "Northern Triangle" of Central America—El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—has risen steadily as violence has increased and transnational organized crime has gained a foothold in the region. The safety and well-being of these migrants—and particularly the unaccompanied children—must be at the heart of every policy decision made in response to this humanitarian crisis.

The only long term solution to this crisis is a holistic approach that prioritizes safety and opportunity for children in the countries of the Northern Triangle. Increased border enforcement must be accompanied by more meaningful measures to ensure that all migrants in danger of persecution have access to a meaningful opportunity to seek asylum. Children in particular must have the legal and social assistance they need to determine whether or not they have a refugee claim or other forms of legal relief available to them and, above all, to ensure that their lives are protected.

It is crucial that we deal with this urgent humanitarian situation while maintaining our country's commitment to asylum seekers and refugees. As organizations based on Jewish values, we oppose any plans to "reprogram" funds that had been budgeted to pay for refugee resettlement services. Such cuts to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program would have devastating consequences for recently arrived refugees as they begin their lives anew in our communities. The Administration and Congress should not be pitting the interests of resettled refugees directly against those of migrant children. Based on the Jewish values to which we adhere and our proud history as a community and nation established by immigrants and refugees, we urge the U.S. government to protect both children and refugees in a humane manner.

