

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4504

January 7, 2016

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

Dear Mr. President:

Our nation has always been a beacon of hope and a refuge for the oppressed. As a country, we have a fundamental responsibility to keep families together and welcome those seeking refuge from extreme violence and persecution. I am therefore extremely disappointed that this weekend the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) began large-scale raids in our communities to deport families who made the perilous journey to flee extreme violence. These raids contravene President Obama's directive to "more humanely" enforce our nation's immigration laws. Instead of raids, DHS should take measurable steps to protect children and families who have sought refuge, employing administrative relief to these vulnerable groups such as granting Temporary Protected Status (TPS).

In the summer of 2014, we saw a wave of mothers and children arrive to the U.S. to escape extreme violence in Central America. These mothers fled because of gangs murdering their husbands, targeting their sons for recruitment, and threatening their daughters with sexual violence. More than 80 percent of these migrant women detained were found to have a credible threat to their safety if they were returned home. Yet, nearly 80 percent of these cases are ending with DHS ordering these same families deported back to the very dangerous conditions they fled. Disturbingly, it has been reported that as many as 83 Central American immigrants recently denied asylum were murdered within months of their return.

Families represented by counsel successfully obtain asylum or other forms of humanitarian most of the time, but the majority of detained families lack access to legal advice and assistance, often because of financial, logistical, or governmental obstacles. Without adequate legal counsel, many do not understand the court proceedings and struggle to get their cases heard adequately and fairly. Already, courts have temporarily halted the deportation of dozens of individuals rounded up in this weekend's raids because of the ineffective legal counsel they received.

Raids are not the answer. We cannot continue to employ inhumane tactics involving rounding up and deporting tens of thousands of immigrant families to address a crisis that requires compassion. It is critical to acknowledge that most of these families are refugees seeking asylum and entitled to humanitarian protection and legal counsel.

Instead of immigration raids, I urge you to use your executive authority to protect – not deport – these families by extending TPS for those fleeing unsafe countries in Central America. Extreme violence constitutes an “extraordinary and temporary condition” that prevents individuals from returning in safety. Through TPS, DHS could provide employment authorization and protection from deportation for a significant portion of the nationals fleeing dangerous countries.

Consistent with our welcoming immigrant tradition to harbor those fleeing violence and persecution, let us have compassion for unaccompanied minors and victims of domestic violence and criminal gang activity. I urge you to immediately end these raids and not deport families back to countries where a death sentence awaits.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter,

Sincerely,



Bernard Sanders

CC:

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