

February 26, 2019

Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
3801 Nebraska Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20528

**RE: INTERFAITH LETTER REQUESTING TERMINATION OF REMAIN IN MEXICO POLICY**

Dear Secretary Nielsen:

We, the 363 undersigned leaders of diverse faith communities and 141 faith-based organizations, write to condemn the baseless and immoral Migrant Protection Protocols, also known as the Remain in Mexico Policy. We request the immediate termination of this egregious policy which returns vulnerable asylum seekers to Mexico and puts them at risk of further harm while they wait for their case to be processed in the United States.

Our faith traditions compel us to welcome one another with love and compassion, regardless of place of birth, religion, or ethnicity. Our diverse moral teachings find consistency in the absolute value of the human person and our obligation to protect the most vulnerable among us. We call on you to uphold our country's asylum law and respect asylum seekers and others seeking protection as the human beings they are and to work to address the root causes that drive people from their homes in search of safety.

The Remain in Mexico policy must be terminated immediately for the following reasons:

**I. The policy puts people fleeing danger back in harm's way**

Our country's asylum laws are based upon the international principle of non-refoulement<sup>1</sup> – a promise that we as the United States will not send people back to countries where their lives or freedom will be at risk. These laws were designed by Congress to protect the world's most vulnerable people from persecution. They codify our longstanding policy to be a beacon of hope to those seeking safety and security, the same values that make up the building blocks of America's faith traditions.

Asylum seekers arriving at our southern border have been driven from their homes by unspeakable and unrelenting violence. Countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras have some of the highest homicide rates in the world for countries that are not classified as being at war<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The principle of non-refoulement under international human rights law", U.N. Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Migration/GlobalCompactMigration/ThePrincipleNon-RefoulementUnderInternationalHumanRightsLaw.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> "Children and Families Fleeing Violence in Central America," Adriana Beltran, WOLA, <https://www.wola.org/analysis/people-leaving-central-americas-northern-triangle/>

Requiring asylum seekers to wait in Mexico while their cases are processed puts them at risk of the very harm they are fleeing as well as new dangers. Since July 2017, the dangers facing refugees and migrants in Mexico have escalated. Asylum seekers forced to return to Mexico face risk of homelessness, malnourishment, disease, assault, kidnapping and death<sup>3</sup>. Recent reports confirm that Mexican authorities continue to improperly return asylum seekers to their countries of persecution and that the deficiencies in the Mexican asylum system have grown<sup>4</sup>. Reports show exceedingly high impunity rates for crimes against migrants and asylum seekers and that crimes against asylum seekers and migrants—including assault, extortion, kidnapping, rape, and murder—largely go uninvestigated and unpunished<sup>5</sup>. Additionally, the policy has serious implications for children asylum seekers – leaving them without access to education and other factors that will permanently affect their development, health, and well-being.

DHS' Remain in Mexico policy will require certain asylum seekers arriving at the southern border to remain in Mexico as they wait for their cases to proceed in the United States. Current backlogs in U.S. immigration courts indicate that these wait times could be months or even years.<sup>6</sup> Instead of meaningful work to address the root causes that cause people to flee, this policy will re-traumatize and hurt people fleeing for their lives, running counter to Congressional intent, pragmatism, and deeply held American and faith values.

## **II. The policy jeopardizes access to counsel, due process, and overall ability for a person to find safety in the United States**

A just and moral immigration system requires the highest standard of justice and mercy. Asylum seekers' due process right to access legal counsel both during the assessment at ports of entry and while waiting in Mexico is seriously compromised by the policy. Navigating our complex asylum system while unrepresented is incredibly difficult when a person is inside the U.S., let alone waiting in dangerous conditions in Mexico<sup>7</sup>. Legal representation is key in helping a person put forward their best case. It is crucial to assist people with language barriers and help explain the reasons they fled, the violence and trauma experienced and the fears of returning home.

Regarding the availability of counsel at ports of entry, the policy states that the U.S. "is currently unable to provide access to counsel during the assessment given the limited capacity and resources at ports-of-entry and Border Patrol stations as well as the need for the orderly and

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<sup>3</sup> "Migrant caravan families face illness, exhaustion and danger,"

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/01/migrant-caravan-mexico-journey-illness-exhaustion-danger>

<sup>4</sup> "Mexico: Still not safe for Refugees and Migrants," <https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/mexico-still-not-safe-refugees-and-migrants>

<sup>5</sup> "Asylum Seekers in Mexico", <https://www.kinoborderinitiative.org/asylum-seekers-mexico/>

<sup>6</sup> USCIS to Take Action to Address Asylum Backlog, <https://www.uscis.gov/news/news-releases/uscis-take-action-address-asylum-backlog>

<sup>7</sup> "Without a Lawyer, Asylum Seekers Struggle with Confusing Legal Processes", NPR,

<https://www.npr.org/2018/02/25/588646667/without-a-lawyer-asylum-seekers-struggle-with-confusing-legal-processes>

efficient processing of individuals.” While awaiting a court date in Mexico, the ability to obtain a U.S. legal representative will be nearly insurmountable. In the slim chance a person is able to retain legal representation, the logistics of speaking to and providing them with the necessary documentation to support their asylum claim would be costly, confusing, and negatively impact a person’s case. Given these unnecessary barriers, the policy will prevent asylum seekers from having a fair and equitable opportunity to seek protection and find refuge.

Across faith traditions, we are taught to meet asylum seekers with open arms, to welcome them, and offer them safety and protection. Together, as faith leaders and faith-based organizations, we call on you to rescind the Remain in Mexico policy and reaffirm our moral and legal obligations to welcome and process all asylum seekers and others seeking protection. We urge you to uphold the rights and dignity of all people.

If you have any questions or require any additional information, please contact Jill Marie Bussey, Advocacy Director at the Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC) at [jbussey@cliniclegal.org](mailto:jbussey@cliniclegal.org).

Sincerely,

### **Faith organizations**

Adorers of the Blood of Christ, US Region  
Adrian Dominican Sisters Immigration Assistance  
Agencia ALPHA  
Arizona Justice For Our Neighbors  
Asbury United Methodist Church  
Bend The Arc  
Bethany Christian Services  
Briggs Center for Faith and Action  
Bronx Christian Fellowship Church  
Buena Vista United Methodist Church  
Cabrini Immigrant Services of NYC, Inc.  
Calgary Lutheran  
Calvary Presbyterian Church (USA)  
Casa Reina  
Catholic Charities' Esperanza Center  
Catholic Charities of Central and Northern Missouri  
Catholic Charities of Central and Northern Missouri: Refugee and Immigration Services  
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington  
Catholic Charities of West Tennessee  
Catholic Church  
Catholic Community Services of Utah  
Catholic Immigration Services - Little Rock

Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.  
Catholic Multicultural Center  
Chicago Benedictines for Peace  
Church World Service  
Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice  
Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach  
Congregation of Divine Providence of KY  
Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes  
Congregation of St. Joseph  
Congregation Rodeph Shalom  
DC Catholic Charities  
DC-MD Justice For Our Neighbors  
Diocese of Atlanta  
Diocese of Davenport  
Disciples Center for Public Witness  
Disciples Justice Action Network  
Disciples Refugee and Immigration Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
Dominican Sisters ~ Grand Rapids  
Ecumenical Peace Institute/CALC  
En Camino  
Fair Oaks United Methodist Church  
Faith Communities Organizing for Sanctuary  
First United Methodist Church, Corvallis  
Franciscan Action Network  
Free Mind Immigration Council  
Friends Committee on National Legislation  
Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart  
HIAS  
Hogar Immigrant Services, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington  
Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters - USA-JPIC  
HOPE Border Institute  
Hope Border Institute/Instituto Fronterizo Esperanza  
Immigrant Family Support Network  
Interfaith Action of SW Michigan  
Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity  
Interfaith Welcome Coalition  
Interfaith Worker Justice  
Jesuit Social Research Institute  
Justice and Peace Ministry of the Diocese of Joliet  
Justice For Our Neighbors East Texas  
Justice For Our Neighbors Houston  
Justice for Our Neighbors North Central Texas  
Justice For Our Neighbors, Board Member.

Justice for Our Neighbors-Michigan  
Justice, Peace and Reconciliation Commission, Priests of the Sacred Heart, US  
Province  
LA Voice, member of PICO CA  
Leadership Conference of Women Religious  
LUCHA Ministries, Inc.  
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service  
Maine Council of Churches  
Marianist Social Justice Collaborative  
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns  
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office  
Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity  
Missionary Sisters  
Multicultural Family Center  
National Justice for Our Neighbors  
National Religious Campaign Against Torture  
Network for Environmental & Economic Responsibility /United Church Of Christ  
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice  
New York Justice for Our Neighbors  
Newfane Congregational Church, UCC  
NH Conference United Church of Christ Immigrant and Refugee Support Group  
Normandy Park United Church of Christ  
North Carolina Conference UMC  
NYS Interfaith Network for Immigration Reform  
Oakland Catholic Worker  
Our Lady Queen of Peace  
Pax Christi Illinois  
Pax Christi USA  
Pennsylvania Council of Churches  
Ponca, NE United Methodist Women  
Presbytery of the Pacific  
Presentation Sisters at Caminando Juntos  
Priests of the Sacred Heart  
Racine Dominicans  
Refugee and Immigration Services  
Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Eastern American Province  
Sadhana: Coalition of Progressive Hindus  
San Antonio Region Justice For Our Neighbors  
San Fernando Valley Refugee Children Center, Inc.  
Sanctuary Church, TUCO Olympia WA  
School Sisters of Notre Dame - Central Pacific Province  
Sister of Saint Francis of the Neumann Communities  
Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Congregational Leadership

Sisters of Charity, BVM  
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas – Institute Justice Team  
Sisters of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Saint Joseph  
Sisters of St. Dominic of Blauvelt, New York  
Sisters of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities  
Sisters of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities  
Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet  
Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet: Albany Province  
Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia, Ks  
Sisters of the Living Word  
Sisters of the Most Precious Blood of O'Fallon, MO  
Sisters of the Presentation of Mary  
South East Asian Faith Initiatives  
Srs. of St. Joseph of Carondelet LA  
St. Louis Inter-Faith Committee on Latin America (IFCLA)  
Tennessee Justice for Our Neighbors  
The Baptist Church in Warren  
The California Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church  
The Good Shepherd United Church of Christ  
The GreenValley/Sahuarita Samaritans  
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society  
Trinity Church of Austin - UCC & UMC  
Union for Reform Judaism  
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice (UUSJ)  
United Church of Christ  
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries  
United Methodist Women  
United University Church  
Webster Presbyterian Church  
Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice  
Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER)  
Women's Interfaith Dialogue of Oak Ridge

### **Faith leaders**

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Sr. Kathleen Adamsku (Charleston, South Carolina)  
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Michael Fischer, Immigration Sub-Committee Lead (Walnut Creek, California)  
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Karen Jackson, Coordinator Peace and Social Justice Committee (Woodridge, Illinois)  
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Bruce Neuburge, Member of the Social Justice Council (San Francisco, California)  
Rev. Kathy Neufeld Dunn (North Newton, Kansas)  
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Rev. L. Fitzgerald Reist, II (Sacramento, California)  
Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow (San Francisco, California)  
Dr. Margaret Rice (New York, New York)

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Ruling Elder Marilyn M. Rodahan (Wantagh, New York)  
JV. Carlos Rodriguez (San Antonio, Texas)  
Sr. Patricia Rogan (Charleston, South Carolina)  
Sr. Patricia Rogucki, S.F.C.C. (Baltimore, Maryland)  
Rev. Dr. Ruth Rosell (Prairie Village, Kansas)  
The Rev Patricia Ross (Gualala, California)  
Rabbi Michael Rothbaum (Maynard, Massachusetts)  
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Rev. Sally Scheib (Hillside, Illinois)  
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Br. Tahil Sharma (Los Angeles, California)  
Rev. Cass Shaw (Bridgeport, Connecticut)  
Imam Yussuf Sheikh (South Africa)  
The Rev. Linda Shelton (Houston, Texas)  
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Sr. Roberta Smith (Mt. Vernon, New York)  
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Rev. Elias Soriano (Sherman, Texas)  
The Rev. John Sosnowski (Villanova, Pennsylvania)  
Rev. Suzanne Spaulding (Perkasie, Pennsylvania)  
Sr. Rita Specht (Alsip, Illinois)  
Rev. Laura Speiran (Clarkston, Michigan)  
Rev. Jeffrey Spencer (Fremont, California)  
Pastor Jeff St. Clair, ELCA (El Paso, Texas)  
Rev. Anthony Stanganelli (Westbury, New York)  
Sr. Judy Stephens (Concordia, Kansas)  
Rev. Ron Stief (Washington, DC)  
Rev. Sadie Stone (San Francisco, California)

Minister Chrissy Stonebraker-Martinez (Cleveland, Ohio)  
Rev. Kristin Gill Stoneking (Berkeley, California)  
Dr. Charles Strain (Evanston, Illinois)  
Rev. Sandra Strauss (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania)  
Elder Maria Studer (Levittown, New York)  
Sr. Suzanne Susany (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)  
Rev. Alyss Swanson (Los Gatos, California)  
CLM Sandra Sypherd (Hastings, Nebraska)  
Rev. David Tatgenhorst (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)  
Rev. Wendy Taylor Lacey (Olympia, Washington)  
Sensei Abby Terris (Corvallis, Oregon)  
Rev. Linda Theophilus (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)  
Rev. Puja A.J. Thomson (New Paltz, New York)  
The Rev. Canon Maria Tjeltveit (Allentown, Pennsylvania)  
Sr. Sheilamarie Tobbe (Lyndhurst, Ohio)  
Rev. Dr. Frederick Trost (Sheboygan, Wisconsin)  
Rev. George Tulloch (New York, New York)  
Rev. Dr. Myrna Tuttle (Santa Barbara, California)  
Rev. Dr. David Usher (San Mateo, California)  
Rev. Dr. Eliezer Valentin-Castanon (Frederick, Maryland)  
Rev. Debra Valentine (Ponca, Nebraska)  
Rev. Dr. John Van Eenwyk (Olympia, Washington)  
Sr. Therese Vaulet (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)  
OP Jean Verber (Racine, Wisconsin)  
Alexander Vishio, Acting Associate Conference Minister (Catonsville, Maryland)  
Sr. Rose Wagner (Syracuse, New York)  
Rev. Kara Wagner Sherer (Chicago, Illinois)  
Sr. Mary Walheim, OSF (Williamsville, New York)  
Cantor Risa Wallach (Oakland, California)  
Rev. Dr. Austin Watson (Hendersonville, North Dakota)  
Rabbi Elyse Wechterman (Wyncote, Pennsylvania)  
Rev. Vail Weller (San Mateo, California)  
Rev. Robin Wells (Lafayette, California)  
Sr. Marge White (Fort Wayne, Indiana)  
Pastor Benjamin White (Pennsauken, New Jersey)  
Rev. Thomas Widlund (Woodland, California)  
Rev. Mary Kay Will (Upland, California)  
Rev. Sharon Williams (Norristown, Pennsylvania)  
Rev. Julie Wilson (Emmitsburg, Maryland)  
Rev. Dr. Douglas Wingeier (Asheville, North Carolina)  
Rev. Allan Wysocki (Glen Rock, Pennsylvania)  
The Rev. Canon Dr. C. Denise Yarbrough (Rochester, New York)  
The Rev. Johanna Young (Washington, New Hampshire)  
The Rev. Linda Young (Pullman, Washington)

Rev. Samuel Yun (Alameda, California)  
Rev. Charlene Belsom Zellmer (Bethesda, Maryland)  
Rev. Dr. Mark Zier (San Francisco, California)  
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Sr. Carol Zupancic (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)