

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-refoulement¹ – 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 war².

¹ 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>

² "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 death³. 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 grown⁴. 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 unpunished⁵. 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.⁶ 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 Mexico⁷. 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

³ "Migrant caravan families face illness, exhaustion and danger,"

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

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

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

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

⁷ "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.

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

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Rev. Mark Adams (Douglas, Arizona)
Sr. Kathleen Adamsku (Charleston, South Carolina)
Sr. Louise Alff (Syracuse, New York)
Rev. Dr. Suzanne Allen (Loveland, Ohio)
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Rev. Neal Anderson (Walnut Creek, California)
Dr. Marcia Anderson (Ann Arbor, Michigan)
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Sr. Maria Orlandini (Washington, DC)
Dr. Tavis Page (Woodside, California)
Andrea Paret, Peace with Justice Coordinator (South Sioux City, Nebraska)
Sr. Francis James Paris (Syracuse, New York)
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Sr. Mary Ann Penner (Chicago, Illinois)
Rev. Lyssette Perez (Rockaway, New Jersey)
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Dr. Margaret Rice (New York, New York)

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Rev. Michele Robbins (Orinda, California)
Ruling Elder Marilyn M. Rodahan (Wantagh, New York)
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Sr. Patricia Rogucki, S.F.C.C. (Baltimore, Maryland)
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The Rev Patricia Ross (Gualala, California)
Rabbi Michael Rothbaum (Maynard, Massachusetts)
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Rabbi Laura Rumpf (Oakland, California)
The Rev. Robert Sammis (Glendale, California)
Deacon John Sandlin (Summerville, South Carolina)
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Rev. Mandy Sayers (Olney, Maryland)
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Rev. Dr. Donna Schaper (New York, New York)
Rev. Sally Scheib (Hillside, Illinois)
Rev. Marcus Schlegel-Preheim (Boise, Idaho)
Rev. Anne Schlesinger (Bakersfield, California)
Sr. Ann Scholz, SSND (Silver Spring, Maryland)
Rev. Kate Shaner (Hilliard, Ohio)
Br. Tahil Sharma (Los Angeles, California)
Rev. Cass Shaw (Bridgeport, Connecticut)
Imam Yussuf Sheikh (South Africa)
The Rev. Linda Shelton (Houston, Texas)
Sr. Patricia Siemen, OP (Adrian, Michigan)
Rev. Susie Smith (Greenville, South Carolina)
Sr. Roberta Smith (Mt. Vernon, New York)
Rev. Susan Smith (San Jose, California)
Rev. Donald Smith (Glendale, California)
Rev. Elias Soriano (Sherman, Texas)
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Rev. Laura Speiran (Clarkston, Michigan)
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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)
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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)
Rev. Dr. Paul Ziese (San Antonio, Texas)
Sr. Carol Zupancic (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)