

April 16, 2019

[Via Email]

Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Kevin K. McAleenan
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 Acting Secretary McAleenan:

We, the 472 undersigned leaders of diverse faith communities and 198 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

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>

Honduras have some of the highest homicide rates in the world for countries that are not classified as being at war².

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.

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

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>

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 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
African American Ministers In Action
Agencia ALPHA
Aquinas Center
Bayard Rustin Liberation Initiative
Bend The Arc
Bethany Christian Services
Briggs Center for Faith and Action
Buena Vista United Methodist Church
Buenos Vecinos
Cabrinian Immigrant Services of NYC, Inc.
Calgary Lutheran
Calvary Presbyterian Church (USA)
Caminando Juntos - Presentation Sisters
Casa Reina
Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Boston
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 Charities, Diocese of San Diego
Catholic Church

Catholic Community Services of Utah
Catholic Diocese of Little Rock
Catholic Immigration Services - Little Rock
Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.
Catholic Multicultural Center
Chicago Benedictines for Peace
Christian Fellowship Church - Bronx
Church World Service
Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
Colectiva Legal del Pueblo
Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach
Columbia Jewish Congregation
Conference of Presentation Sisters
Conference United Church of Christ Immigrant and Refugee Support Group - NH
Congregation of Divine Providence of KY
Congregation of Our Lady of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces
Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes
Congregation of St. Joseph
Congregation Rodeph Shalom
Crossing Borders- Dubuque
DC Catholic Charities
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
Dominican Sisters of Sparkill
Dominicans of Sinsinawa
Ecumenical Peace Institute/CALC
En Camino
Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta
Faith Commons
Faith Communities Organizing for Sanctuary
Faith Voices for Justice - Wisconsin
Felician Sisters of North America
First United Methodist Church, Corvallis
Foundry United Methodist Church
Franciscan Action Network
Franciscan Sisters of the Poor, USA
Free Mind Immigration Council
Frida Kahlo Community Organization
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Global Cleveland
Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart
HIAS
Hogar Immigrant Services, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington
Holy Spirit Adoration Sisters
Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters - USA-JPIC
HOPE Border Institute/Instituto Fronterizo Esperanza
Immigrant Family Support Network
Interfaith Action of SW Michigan

Inter-Faith Committee on Latin America (IFCLA) - St. Louis
Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity
Interfaith Welcome Coalition
Interfaith Worker Justice
Interreligious Task Force on Central America and Colombia
Jesuit Social Research Institute
Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Greater Rochester
Jewish Family Service of San Diego
Joliet Franciscans
JPIC Committee, Franciscans, T.O.R.
Justice and Peace Ministry of the Diocese of Joliet
Justice For Our Neighbors - Houston
Justice For Our Neighbors - Arizona
Justice For Our Neighbors - DC, MD
Justice For Our Neighbors - East Texas
Justice for Our Neighbors - Michigan
Justice for Our Neighbors - New York
Justice for Our Neighbors - North Central Texas
Justice For Our Neighbors - San Antonio Region
Justice for Our Neighbors - Tennessee
Justice For Our Neighbors, Board Member.
Justice, Peace and Reconciliation Commission, Priests of the Sacred Heart, US Province
Kitsap Immigrant Assistance Center
L.A. Community Legal Center and Educational
L.A. Voice, Pico, CA
La Alianza Comunitaria Transnacional
La Union del Pueblo Entero
Lab/Shul
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
Migrant and Immigrant Community Action Project
Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity
Missionary Sisters
Multicultural Family Center
N.I.S.E.
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
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
Newfane Congregational Church, UCC
North Carolina Conference UMC
Northern Valley Catholic Social Service
NYS Interfaith Network for Immigration Reform
Oakland Catholic Worker
Ola Raza, INC
Our Lady Queen of Peace
Pax Christi - Illinois

Pax Christi USA
Pennsylvania Council of Churches
Presbytery of the Pacific
Presentation Sisters at Caminando Juntos
Priests of the Sacred Heart
Project IRENE
Province of St. Joseph of the Capuchin Order
Racine Dominicans
Refugee and Immigration Services
Refugee Children Center, Inc. - San Fernando Valley
Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary - Eastern American Province
Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange
Sadhana: Coalition of Progressive Hindus
Sagrado Corazon Catholic Church
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 of New York
Sisters of Charity of Sanit Elizabeth, Office of Peace, Justice, and Ecological Integrity
Sisters of Charity, BVM
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas – Institute Justice Team
Sisters of Mercy, Mid-Atlantic Community
Sisters of Notre Dame
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 Clinton, Iowa
Sisters of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities
Sisters of St. Joseph of Boston
Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet
Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet - Albany Province
Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet - LA
Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia, KS
Sisters of the Living Word
Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, Immigrant and Refugee Committee - O'Fallon, MO
Sisters of the Presentation of Mary
Sisters of the Presentations of Dubuque, IA
South East Asian Faith Initiatives
Spanish Education for Women (SEW)
St. Francis Community Services
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 Interfaith LGBTI Clergy Association
The Third Order of the Society of St. Francis
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
Thrive International Programs
Trinity Church of Austin - UCC & UMC
T'ruah: the Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice (UUSJ)

United Church of Christ
United Church of Christ - Normandy Park
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
United Church of Santa Fe Outreach Committee
United Methodist Church - Asbury
United Methodist Church - Fair Oaks
United Methodist Women
United Methodist Women - Ponca, NE
United Presbyterian Church
United University Church
Wallingford Indivisible
Webster Presbyterian Church
Welcoming Immigrants Faith Network
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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Br. Frederick Cabras (Chicago, Illinois)
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The Rev. Dr. Tim Ives (Bedford Hills, New York)
Karen Jackson, Coordinator of Peace and Social Justice Committee (Woodridge, Illinois)
Rev. Karen Jackson (Staten Island, New York)
Stephen Jackson, Social Justice Ministry (Woodridge, Illinois)
Rev. Stephanie Jaeger (Los Angeles, California)
Dr. Charlene Jin Lee (Los Angeles, California)
Rev. S. M. Johnson-Atchley (Maryville, Tennessee)
Rev. Linda Jones (Barnesville, Georgia)
Dr. Stephen Jones (Kansas City, Missouri)
Rev. C. Don Jones (Louisville, Tennessee)
Sr. Mary Jude, scmc (Willimantic, Connecticut)

Rev. Alicia Julia-Stanley (Lebanon, Pennsylvania)
Sr. Barbara Juskiewicz (Buffalo, New York)
Rabbi Dr. Yoel Kahn (Berkeley, California)
Rev. Dr. Sunny Kang (Rancho Palos Verdes, California)
George Kanuck, UU Social Justice Advocate (Bluffton, South Carolina)
Rabbi Nancy Kasten (Dallas, Texas)
Sr. Laurita Kelly (Syracuse, New York)
Rev. Kenneth Kennon (Tucson, Arizona)
Sr. Eileen Kernan (Syracuse, New York)
Rev. Edward Kilianski (Franklin, Wisconsin)
Rev. Dawn King Rio (Vista, California)
Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon (San Diego, California)
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Matthew Knee, Executive Director (Fort Walton Beach, Florida)
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Elder Jim Lamm (Culver City, California)
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Sr. Martha Larsen (San Francisco, California)
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Sr. Bea Leising (Buffalo, New York)
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Minister Bruce Lohmann (Bay Point, California)
Rev. John Long (Buffalo, New York)
Sr. Marie Lucey (Hyattsville, Maryland)
Rev. Greg Lugn (Lincoln, Nebraska)
Rev. Mark Lukens (East Rockaway, New York)
Rev. Les Lungren (Claremont, California)
Rev. Jim Luther (Oakhurst, California)

Sr. Mary Cynthia Ann Machlik (Livonia, Michigan)
Sr. Loretto Maes (St. Louis, Missouri)
Rev. Kristin Maier (Northfield, Minnesota)
Rabbi Bonnie Margulis (Madison, Wisconsin)
Rev. Allison Mark (Gardena, California)
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Mr. Damian Maureira (El Paso, Texas)
Rev. DaVita McCallister (Somerville, Massachusetts)
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Deaconess Sharon McCar (Irvine, California)
Sr. Nancy McCarthy (Dubuque, Iowa)
Sr. Mary McCauley (Dubuque, Iowa)
Sr. Ellen McClure (Warrendale, Pennsylvania)
Rev. Valerie McEntee (San Bruno, California)
Sr. Donna McGartland (Fayetteville, New York)
Rev. Laurie McHugh (Windsor, California)
Rev. Janet McKeithen (Santa Monica, California)
Pastor Robert McKenzie (Oakland, California)
Bro. Brian McLauchlin (Washington, DC)
Sr. Mary McMahan (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)
Dr. Belle McMaster (Monticello, Georgia)
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Sr. Rose Mary Meyer (Chicago, Illinois)
Sr. Christina Meyer (Salina, Kansas)
Sr. Rose Meyer (Wilmette, Illinois)
Rev. Ben Meyers (San Mateo, California)
Sr. Nancy Miller (Clinton, Iowa)
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