



**USCCB**  
**Committee on Migration**  
3211 Fourth Street, NE  
Washington DC 20017



8757 Georgia Avenue, Suite 850  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

---

January 8, 2016

The Honorable Jeh Johnson  
Secretary of Homeland Security  
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Johnson:

On behalf of the Committee on Migration of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB/COM) and the Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC), we are writing to express our grave concern over the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) recent enforcement actions resulting in 121 Central Americans, primarily mothers with children, being taken into custody for impending deportation.

From January 2-4, DHS enforcement officers entered homes in immigrant communities, primarily in Georgia, Texas and North Carolina, searching for families to deport. Our organizations have first-hand knowledge that these actions have generated fear among immigrants and have made their communities more distrustful of law enforcement and vulnerable to misinformation, exploitation and fraud.

We find such targeting of immigrant women and children -- most of whom fled violence and persecution in their home countries -- to be inhumane and a grave misuse of limited enforcement resources. DHS's action contrasts sharply with the statements articulated by President Obama himself in November 2014, namely, that his administration would pursue the deportation of "felons, not families; criminals, not children; gang members, not a Mom who's working hard to provide for her kids."

While the mothers who were the targets of DHS's recent actions had deportation orders, we note that already the Board of Immigration Appeals has recognized that some of these deportation orders involve serious due process concerns. For example, the [CARA Family Detention Pro Bono Representation and Advocacy Project](https://cliniclegal.org/cara) (<https://cliniclegal.org/cara>), of which CLINIC is a

partner, has succeeded in halting the deportation of nine of the Central American families apprehended by DHS this week, receiving stays on their deportation orders.

These cases, and likely many others, illustrate the grave due process issues facing these mothers and children. We object to the removal of any migrants who were apprehended without first confirming that they received actual meaningful opportunities to present their asylum claims at hearings in immigration court.

While we recognize the vital role that the federal government plays in ensuring orderly and coherent migration processes, we disagree with the [underlying rationale](#) behind this action: that sending children and families back to the dangerous environment they fled will serve as a deterrent for other children and families who are considering fleeing Central America. We know from our experience with serving thousands of Central American children and families in the United States that most left their families and their homelands because they felt they had no other choice.

To send migrant children and families back to their home countries would put many of them in grave danger because they would face threats of violence and for some, even death.

We urge the administration to end this practice and not engage in such future enforcement actions targeting immigrant women and children, as they terrify communities and are inconsistent with American values. Instead of enforcement actions, we strongly encourage the administration and Congress to better support the immigration court system by providing it with more attorneys and judges. This will ensure these Central Americans are provided with due process protections that will allow them to make their most effective case for asylum and other possible forms of protection.

Next, we strongly urge that the administration end its deleterious practice of detaining immigrant women and children. There is simply no humane way to detain children. Additionally, it is imperative that the administration and Congress support humanitarian efforts in the region that will help to end the violence and stop conditions that force people to flee their homes. When speaking about immigration policy and enforcement, the administration and Congress must address the root causes of forced migration with equal measure.

Lastly, we again turn our concerns to the families who have been so harmed by this enforcement action. Believing that we are all made in the image of God, we recognize the God-given dignity of every person. These actions, which force people to live in fear and terror and separate families, deny the dignity of the human spirit. We cannot support such actions and urge you to

reject future enforcement efforts of this kind. We promise to continue our efforts to work with you to reform our immigration system and make it truly reflective of American ideals and values.

Thank you for seriously considering our recommendations.

Sincerely,

Most Reverend Eusebio Elizondo  
Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle, WA  
Chairman, USCCB Committee on Migration

Most Reverend Kevin W. Vann  
Bishop of Orange, CA  
Chairman, Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.