



June 23, 2014

Dear Members of Congress:

The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas' Institute Leadership Team is deeply troubled that thousands of Central American children are forced to flee their home countries because of out-of-control violence in the region. Furthermore, we are disturbed by the reaction that some Members of Congress have had to this humanitarian crisis. The situation on the Texas border is not the result of lax border security or rumors about the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program; instead evidence points to the increase of violence in Central America as the main contributing factor for this phenomenon. Until 2011, the annual number of unaccompanied migrant children was steady, around 7,000 a year. After 2011 the number has roughly doubled annually. This influx has primarily been from the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Over the last 4 years the number of children migrants entering the United States is up 700% for Guatemalans, 930% for El Salvadorians and 1300% for Hondurans.

The Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas represents 12 countries, including Guatemala and Honduras. Through our service in these countries, we have witnessed the increased danger children face in their communities. The Northern Triangle countries have some of the highest homicide rates, with Honduras now ranking number one in the world. Honduran males between the ages of 15 and 30 have a 1 in 300 chance of being killed. Tragically, this problem is getting worse. Since 2005, the homicide rate of females in Honduras is up 346%. For males, it is up 292%. While Honduras has been the epicenter of this explosion of violence, El Salvador and Guatemala are experiencing a similar crisis. Increasingly in the Northern Triangle countries, a parent's decision to have a child stay at home is more dangerous than them risking the journey north to the United States.

The Department of Homeland Security now estimates the number of unaccompanied migrant children could reach 90,000 this fiscal year and increase to 120,000 in FY 2015. Under the status-quo, this humanitarian crisis will continue to spiral out of control. The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas recommend that Congress does not react by further fortifying the border. **Instead we call on Congress conduct a full analysis of the roots causes of this humanitarian crisis and how U.S. foreign aid, U.S. trade policy and the War on Drugs are impacting the region. This assessment must include the perspectives of NGOs, faith groups and community leaders.**

The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas' desire for another approach to this humanitarian crisis resonates with the teachings of Pope Francis. When addressing a plenary on the Pastoral Care of Migrants, the Pope asked "**leaders and legislators and the entire international community above all to confront the reality of those who have been displaced by force, with effective projects and new approaches in order to protect their dignity, to improve the quality of their life and to face the challenges that are emerging from modern forms of persecution, oppression and slavery.**"

Sincerely,

Patricia McDermott

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