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Immigrant Rights Groups: Congress Must Investigate Separation & Suffering Caused by Trump ‘Remain-in-Mexico’ Policy

Recent Stories Demonstrate Great Harm to Children on Both Sides of Border

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Ahead of a congressional hearing today about family separation and the mistreatment of migrant children, a group of immigrant rights organizations working on behalf of asylum seekers released a statement and stories of families separated by the Trump administration’s “Remain-in-Mexico” policy:

The following statement is from Al Otro Lado, Center for Gender & Refugee Studies, Human Rights Watch, Kino Border Initiative, Latin American Working Group and the Southern Poverty Law Center.

“Today’s hearing of the House Oversight Committee regarding family separation and the mistreatment of migrants in detention facilities run by the U.S. government is incredibly important. As evidenced by the recent accounts summarized below, the Trump administration’s ‘Remain-in-Mexico’ policy has put migrant children in even greater danger and caused enormous harm on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.”

The groups cited the following examples:

- A woman from El Salvador traveling with her 4-year-old daughter and two younger siblings entered the U.S. near Tijuana, Mexico, to seek asylum. The woman had been the primary caretaker for her siblings ever since their mother was murdered in El Salvador. Upon apprehension by Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the woman and her child were detained and returned to Mexico to await their immigration court hearings, while her siblings were transferred to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), which is responsible for the care and custody of unaccompanied children
- A Guatemalan father and his 15-year-old son were detained separately in CBP holding cells known as *hieleras* (iceboxes) because of their frigid, cramped conditions. Before separating them, CBP officers tore up the son’s birth certificate and threw it in the trash.

After four days in CBP custody, the father was returned to Mexicali under the ‘remain-in-Mexico’ policy. The son was transferred to ORR custody. Following the separation, the son was so traumatized that he had to be hospitalized.

- After crossing the border in Texas, a Nicaraguan mother and her two sons, ages 7 and 18, were detained in a CBP *hielera* for four days. The mother and her younger son were then sent to California, where they spent four more days in CBP custody before being returned to Mexico. Initially, the mother had no idea where to find her older son but learned later that he was detained in Texas.
- Fearing gang violence, a Salvadoran family of four fled to the United States to seek asylum. Following apprehension by CBP, the mother and two daughters were detained for seven days in a *hielera*. Although they became gravely ill, CBP did not allow them to see a doctor. The mother and older daughter have since been returned to Mexico, while the younger daughter and her father (who had been separately detained) were released to live with relatives.

“As this administration has continued to abandon its legal and ethical obligations to those seeking protection in our country, the crisis is as much across the border as it is here.

“Congress must drastically increase oversight regarding the human impact of the administration’s anti-immigrant policies. These policies have created a humanitarian crisis that demands an immediate response.”