



Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking

Statement | May 24, 2018

Separating Immigrant Families Increases Vulnerabilities to Human Trafficking

The Trump administration has signaled a [potential plan](#) to use military bases for holding immigrant children who cross the southern border. These children would include both unaccompanied minors and children separated from their families by the U.S. government. The Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking (ATEST) issued the following statement in opposition.

The administration's proposed plan to use military bases for detaining unaccompanied minors and children forcibly separated from their families after crossing the southern border into the United States is deeply troubling and will have significant adverse consequences. This policy would disrupt and harm families that are separated during detention. It is also in stark contrast to existing Office of Refugee Resettlement policy of placing an unaccompanied child in the least restrictive setting that is in the best interests of the child.

Foreign national minors crossing into the United States, whether unaccompanied or subsequently separated from their families, are already uniquely vulnerable to human trafficking. Many risk factors that contribute to the human trafficking of foreign-national youth – including language barriers, lack of a support system, economic vulnerability and a history of prior abuse, among others – already exist for many minors crossing into the United States. These factors would be exacerbated by this potential detention policy. Deliberate isolation of immigrant youth directly eliminates any safety net they may have had in the U.S., and renders them completely reliant on potential traffickers. Furthermore, this policy may encourage families to separate even before coming into contact with law enforcement, and to avoid such contact, which renders each individual more vulnerable to trafficking and less likely to access assistance if they are victims of trafficking.

The [Victims of Trafficking and Violence Prevention Act \(TVPA\)](#) defines human trafficking as a modern form of slavery and includes both sex and labor trafficking. Immigrant youth who meet the federal definition of trafficking encompass all genders and demographics, and are at risk of forced labor, sexual exploitation or survival sex. They may not know their rights or understand that they are being exploited, and further restricting their movement by detention increases their vulnerability to traffickers seeking to exploit their lack of opportunities for legitimate work and fear of deportation. In many cases, individuals entering the U.S., including children, are fleeing human trafficking in their country of origin.

It is critical that the administration ensure that all families crossing the southern border are not separated, but are instead kept together to strengthen their social safety networks, and that unaccompanied minors are given immediate access to interpreters, culturally competent services, legal and immigration assistance, housing and medical care, and assistance with family reunification.

The Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking (ATEST) is a U.S. based coalition that advocates for solutions to prevent and end all forms of human trafficking and modern slavery in the U.S. and around the world. ATEST is comprised of the following organizations: Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST), Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), Free the Slaves, Human Trafficking Institute, National Network for Youth (NN4Y), Polaris, Safe Horizon, Solidarity Center, United Way, Verité and Vital Voices Global Partnership. www.endslaveryandtrafficking.org

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