

July 29, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Re: U.S. human rights leadership and outcome document for UN High-Level Meeting on Refugees and Migrants

Dear President Obama:

We greatly appreciate the U.S. commitment to hosting a Leaders' Summit on refugees in New York on September 20, 2016 to spur concrete action in addressing the global refugee crisis. We are writing to express our concern however that the United States is urging revisions to language in the draft outcome document for the September 19, 2016 High-Level Meeting on Refugees and Migrants, currently under negotiation at the United Nations, that are aimed at undermining or would in effect undermine international human rights legal protections for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, including children. We urge the United States, long an advocate for the protection of human rights globally, to abandon efforts that would undermine human rights standards and the treatment of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants globally, and to instead support language that reinforces existing international human rights legal protections.

We are particularly concerned that today the United States requested language changes to Paragraph 2.12 that would undermine the current draft outcome document to state that the detention of children is "seldom" in the best interests of children and that we (States) will attempt to minimize its use, which is dramatically different from the position adopted by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and reinforced by an overwhelming number of UN and regional human rights experts that have confirmed that detention on the basis of their or their parents' migration status is never in the best interest of children. We are also concerned with any suggested language aimed at undermining the existing right to liberty under international law and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

We urge the United States to agree to the language in Paragraph 2.12 that was proposed yesterday (July 28) in Revision 3 of the outcome document which makes clear that detention is never in the best interests of children and that states should commit to ending this practice as early as possible.

Mr. President, we applaud your leadership in convening nations on September 20 in New York to discuss responsibility sharing with regard to refugees. However, your administration's recent interventions with respect to the outcome document for the September 19 UN High-Level Meeting suggest that the human rights and well-being of refugees, asylum seekers and other vulnerable migrant populations, particularly children, do not deserve equal consideration. We urge that you reject this inconsistency and reverse your position on this vital issue.

We firmly believe the United States should provide strong global leadership on human rights and should refrain from efforts that subvert global human rights standards. We greatly appreciate the attention of you and your staff to these issues.

Respectfully,

*Americans for Immigrant Justice*

*Amnesty International USA*

*CARECEN (The Central American Resource Center)*

*Casa de Esperanza*

*Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.*

*Center for Gender and Refugee Studies*

*Center for Victims of Torture*

*Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Refugee & Immigration Ministries*

*Church World Service*

*First Focus*

*Free Migration Project*

*Global Campaign to End Immigration Detention of Children*

*HIAS*

*Human Rights First*

*Human Rights Initiative of North Texas*

*Human Rights Watch*

*International Detention Coalition*

*International Rescue Committee*

*Kids in Need of Defense*

*Latin America Working Group*

*Leadership Conference of Women Religious*

*National Immigrant Justice Center*

*National Immigration Forum*

*National Justice for Our Neighbors*

*Oxfam America*

*Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services*

*Refugees International*

*Scalabrini International Migration Network*

*Sisters of Mercy of the Americas – Institute Justice Team*

*The Greater Reading Immigration Project*

*U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants*

*Unitarian Universalist Service Committee*

*We Belong Together*

*Women's Refugee Commission*

*Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights at the University of Chicago*

cc: Cecilia Muñoz, Assistant to the President and Director of the Domestic Policy Council  
Felicia Escobar, Special Assistant to the President for Immigration Policy  
Amy Pope, Deputy Homeland Security Advisor and Deputy Assistant to the President at the National Security Council  
Anne C. Richard, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration  
Bathsheba N. Crocker, Assistant Secretary for International Organizations Affairs  
Samantha Power, United States Ambassador to the United Nations  
Ronald L. Newman, Director for Human Rights & Refugee Protection, National Security Council  
Shelly Pitterman, Regional Representative for the USA and the Caribbean, UNHCR