**Congress Must Reject Rollbacks to Child Protection Law**

**BACKGROUND**

* As the U.S. government responds to the humanitarian crisis faced by refugee children and families fleeing violence in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, both President Obama and some members of Congress are **proposing to weaken** important legal protections for vulnerable children.
* The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) of 2008 is a critical American law that prevents the deportation of children back into the hands of traffickers and others who would exploit them.
* This trafficking law, often referred to as the TVPRA, was passed by **both chambers of Congress** by unanimous consent and was signed into law by **President Bush** in 2008. Unanimous consent almost never happens in Congress.
* Some politicians are attempting to blame the dramatic increase in unaccompanied children fleeing to the US on this law. This is inaccurate and denies the reality that these children are fleeing **escalating conflict, violence, gang activity and exploitation**.
* In fact, Guatemalans, Hondurans and Salvadorans are **not only seeking refuge in the US**. Asylum requests in the neighboring countries of Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Belize have increased by 712 percent from 2008 to 2013.

**KEY TALKING POINTS**

* **We cannot allow thousands of refugee children to be put at risk of exploitation, trafficking, rape and even death.** If changes to this law are pushed through Congress, thousands of children will not have a meaningful opportunity to have their story heard, apply for asylum, or be screened by child welfare personnel — and would be rapidly deported to potentially life-threatening situations.
* **It is unconscionable that some politicians would want to roll back protections for children just because there are more children in need of protection.** Expediting the deportation of children without proper screening and allowing their case to be heard is wrong for these kids and not who we are as a nation.
* **This is *not* a crisis for our country. This is a life and death *crisis* for these children** who are fleeing rape, violence and exploitation. We’re a nation of more than 300 million. We’re America, we can easily muster the moral courage and resources to protect children who are fleeing violence, rape and exploitation.
* **These kids are presenting a moral test for our country.** How our nation responds to the most vulnerable children defines who we are as a nation. We cannot fail this test or these kids. Jesus set this example. He said, “Let the children come to me,” when his disciples tried to push them away.
* **The sporadic and small protests that we’ve seen against these innocent kids is un-American and un-Christian.** These fringe minority voices do not represent our nation’s churches or our country as a whole. Our country has always been beacon of hope and welcome to the sojourner. The faith community is helping to lead the response to provide care and support to these kids.
* **How our government responds to these kids is a rule of law issue.** This trafficking law is the law of the land. If Republicans are constantly furious that President Obama doesn’t faithfully implement the laws passed by Congress, then this issue is a litmus test for politicians on whether they are truly for the rule or just want to attack the President.
* **We can’t solve a refugee crisis at the border.** We need to work with our international partners and make efforts in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador to stabilize the situation there so that little children and families don’t have to flee for their lives. We need to invest resources in a way that will give children and families the ability to remain free from fear in their home countries. Governments need to work to stop smugglers who are exploiting people in desperate situations.

**SAMPLE STORIES
“Leticia”**After “Leticia” was raped by over a dozen gang members, she and her family reported the crime to the police. They immediately began to receive death threats. In the absence of any protection, and likely complicity by police in the gang’s terror campaign, the local partner attempted to relocate Leticia to a women’s shelter. The shelter refused to take the case because of fear that they would not be able to protect either Leticia or their other beneficiaries from the gang. In the end to protect Leticia from further harm, she had to be leave Honduras. [Source: [Jesuit Conference](https://jesuit.capwiz.com/jesuit/issues/alert/?alertID=63273656)]  **“Josefina”**A 16-year old girl, "Josefina" became the target of the local head of a gang that controlled her neighborhood in El Salvador. The head of the wanted Josefina to be his “girlfriend” and threatened to kidnap her or kill her family if she didn’t comply. Josefina knew another girl from her community who had become the “girlfriend” of a gang member and had been forced to have sex with all the members of the gang. That was not something Josefina was willing to face. Once the gang started harassing her, she stopped going to school and stayed locked in her home until her family was able to make arrangements for her to travel to the U.S. [Source: [UNCHR report](http://www.unhcrwashington.org/sites/default/files/UAC_UNHCR_Children%20on%20the%20Run_Full%20Report.pdf)]
 *\* Names have been changed to protect their identities.*