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CENTRAL AMERICAN RESOURCE CENTER / CENTRO DE RECURSOS CENTROAMERICANOS

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **IMMIGRANT RIGHTS COALITION CALLS FOR RETAINING LEGAL PROTECTIONS OF UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN SHOWING UP AT THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER**

(July 22, 2014, Los Angeles) – In response to the humanitarian crisis caused by thousands of unaccompanied Central American children turning themselves in to immigration authorities at the U.S.-Mexico border, immigrant and human rights organizations in Southern California are calling on Congressional leaders and the Obama administration to keep the protections provided by the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA).

“TVPRA is saving lives,” said Angela Sanbrano, Board President for CARECEN, one of the organizations in the coalition. “Repealing this law would do little to address the factors driving the children to travel alone thousands of miles to get here, would deny them the due process they are entitled to, and would prevent a full, fair and independent determination of whether they have been trafficked or would be harmed, tortured or killed if returned home.”

TVPRA, which received overwhelming bipartisan support and was signed by president George W. Bush in 2008, guarantees that minors who are apprehended at the border, and who do not come from countries contiguous to the United States, receive a hearing before a judge to verify whether they have been victims of human trafficking and determine whether their lives may be threatened if deported.

“This law protects children by simply allowing them to have their case individually considered by a judge before any decisions are made about their fate,” said Lindsay Toczylowski, Directing Attorney at Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project, also a part of the coalition. “It gives them the right to explain why they have fled their country and what the consequences would be if they were returned. If Congress does away with these hearings, many children could be forcibly returned to deadly situations after only a cursory screening at the border or through an inadequate court process that disregards recognized standards of justice.”





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Since 2011, travel by child migrants from the Northern Triangle (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras) is up 700% for Guatemalans, 930% for El Salvador and 1300% for Hondurans. The mass exodus from these three countries mirrors the dramatic increase in violence in the region. Together, they lead the world in homicide rates, with Honduras ranking number one among nations not at war.

“We know that people throughout the United States are eager to hear directly from the Central American children who are being forced to flee to this country,” said Judy London, Directing Attorney of Immigrants’ Rights at Public Counsel, also a member of the coalition. “Unfortunately, precisely because of the horrors they have suffered, it is hard for children to speak publicly without putting themselves and their loved ones back at home at risk, or reliving the trauma they endured. We are here today to give a voice to these children and demand their protection.”

“David,” an 11-year-old who recently made this journey from Honduras, is a case in point. We are protecting his identity by giving him a pseudonym and not revealing his face or that of his mother. He was playing soccer with friends on a recent day and, when running after an errant ball, witnessed a gang shooting that killed one person. Later, when buying tortillas for his grandmother, he witnessed a full shoot-out in which several people were murdered and injured. In the following days, gang members posted themselves in front of his school, as they are doing across the region. He eluded them several times, but feared they would kill him to eliminate him as a witness. His family then arranged for him to come to the United States to protect him from the gang members.

“I would be afraid to be there again,” he said, “with the same violence.”

“‘David’ is a very courageous little boy,” London said. “He is sharing his story with you today because he wants people to understand what is happening to Central American children and why they need protection here.”

CARECEN, the Central American Resource Center, has been working for more than 30 years to protect the rights and dignity of migrants in Southern California. Since its founding in 1983, when thousands of Central Americans were fleeing the brutality of civil war, CARECEN has been playing a pivotal role in changing unjust immigration policies, winning legal status for immigrants, and fostering community activism on issues such as educational reform, drivers’ licenses, and more.

This coalition includes the Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project, Public Counsel, the American Civil Liberties Union-So Cal (ACLU), American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), Bet Tzedek, Central American Resource Center (CARECEN), Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST), Immigration Center for Women and Children, Legal Aid Foundation Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Bar Association, National Immigration Law Center, and Neighborhood Legal Services Los Angeles.

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Interview with “David” is available for press use at <https://vimeo.com/101370467>.

