CARECEN URGES PRESIDENT OBAMA TO PROTECT WELFARE OF CENTRAL AMERICAN CHILDREN, HAS CONCERNS ABOUT A PILOT PROGRAM TO PROCESS THEM IN HOME COUNTRIES

(July 25, 2014, Los Angeles) – As an organization advocating for the rights of Central American immigrants for over 30 years, CARECEN is encouraged that the situation of child refugees at the U.S.-Mexico border is receiving attention from the presidents of all the countries involved.

We agree that the main factor pushing children northward is the violence and persecution they endure from street gangs, drug traffickers and organized crime. Addressing the root causes of this violence is the long-term solution to the humanitarian crisis now upon us. However, we have grave concerns about the proposed pilot program to process refugee claims in Honduras and potentially Guatemala and El Salvador. While we are encouraged by the Obama Administration considering novel measures to address this humanitarian crisis, the government’s capacity to adequately process claims from unrepresented children remains a serious concern. Children may remain unnecessarily in harms’ way if given false hope of refugee status that ultimately may not materialize.

“These young people are telling us that gang members and drug traffickers are stationing themselves outside their schools, following them home, beating the boys, raping the girls,” said Angela Sanbrano, Board President of CARECEN. “We have no reason to think they would be able to safely get to a consulate to make their case to officials and receive protection while they await a decision that may not ultimately be approved.”

For refugees in life-or-death situations, often the only option is to leave. If the fact that a child is seeking refugee protection while in country becomes known, this could further endanger the child and their family. In addition, CARECEN is not confident that consulates can properly adjudicate cases in a timely fashion.

These children are refugees of an undeclared war. We believe that the protections of current U.S. law, including the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008, remain critical to ensuring the welfare of these children. Refugee processing abroad cannot replace individual review of each child’s case in immigration court. We urge President Obama to think first of the safety of these children and avoid further exposing them to danger.
CARECEN is working with local communities to educate the children and their sponsors about the process they face. We are also grateful to the many cities across the country, including Los Angeles, that have expressed a desire to give sanctuary to the children. We believe that is the true spirit of American hospitality.

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.

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Angela Sanbrano is available for interviews