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For Immediate Release

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**Administration Falls Short on Humane Response for
Unaccompanied Minors Traveling to the U.S.**

(June 12, 2014, Los Angeles) -- Over the past year, the humanitarian crisis caused by our broken immigration system has worsened to include tens of thousands of unaccompanied minors who are currently being held in detention centers. The influx of unaccompanied minors, mostly from Central America, attempting to enter the United States has grown at an alarming rate from just below 25,000 last year to the 90,000 that are expected to travel to the United States this year. The conditions in which these minors are held are distressing. Overcrowding and lack of hygiene are prominent. Detention centers have reached capacity and minors are now being transferred to facilities in other states, increasing the difficulty of being reunited with their loved ones.

Contrary to the notion that the increase in migrating youth is a result of the marketing of amnesty by *coyotes*, most youth are escaping lives of insecurity, poverty and recruitment by gangs. The majority of youth traveling to the United States leave behind the ravaging poverty of the poorest countries in the western hemisphere like Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. These countries have also seen a frightening increase in gang violence. Children who refuse to join a gang risk being assaulted or even killed. Youth fleeing to the United States face tremendous risks during their journey and many do not reach their destination. U.S. deportation policy helped create the Central American gang problem over the past quarter century. This regional crisis has now reached a boiling point.

Our broken immigration system further separates parents from their children. Parents who left their children behind to migrate to the United States are financial supporters by sending money to their children but are unable to offer their children protection or guidance. Even relatives of youth who have some sort of status such as TPS or DACA, cannot travel back to their home countries.

Some youth make the decision to migrate to the United States on their own in hopes of reuniting with their parents or relatives that migrated before them. Some migrate to the U.S. to seek a better life even without

relatives in the U.S. One example is the story of “Maria” who is seventeen years old. Her father was murdered when she was less than a month old. Her mother, who witnessed her husband’s murder with “Maria” in her arms, suffers from PTSD and was placed in a psychiatric hospital. “Maria” was abandoned at a relative’s home by her paternal grandmother. These relatives raised her until she couldn’t stay there anymore. “Maria” then decided to migrate to the United States to seek a better future for herself.

Recently, President Obama has called for a comprehensive approach to the problem. He has recruited various departments to attempt a comprehensive solution to the thousands of youth currently being detained. Although this approach is a step in the right direction, it is not enough. **CARECEN stands with all other organizations who have asked President Obama to declare a state of emergency.** In addition, the most immediate concerns and demands are:

- The Administration’s humane treatment of the thousands of minors being detained. This is not a problem that requires a military response. Instead, we urge the administration to find humanitarian solutions that address the children’s needs and trauma. CARECEN strongly urges the administration to detain children as briefly as possible, and to immediately stop housing children in industrial warehouses, bases or other environments inappropriate for already traumatized children.
- A fair and just deportation policy which refrains from sending minors back to the terror of their home countries should be enacted.
- No child should face deportation proceedings alone and without legal representation. All children who are detained or face removal proceedings deserve legal representation. CARECEN urges the president to direct resources toward this purpose.
- The development of comprehensive integration services for these children that address their traumas and help them become contributing members of the community.
- For President Obama to use his power and leadership to stop his unjust deportation policies which have resulted in more than 2 million deportations and now make him the president who has deported the most people in U.S. history.
- For the Congress and the executive office to work together to pass just immigration policies that begin to address our broken and dysfunctional system, focuses on keeping families together, ensures humane treatment of individuals and families, and stops the further criminalization of immigrants and militarization of the border.

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