

Protect Migrants and Refugees during the COVID-19 Pandemic

April 15, 2020

Slowing the spread of COVID-19 requires that everyone be included in prevention and protection strategies, especially the most vulnerable, including migrants and refugees. This pandemic is a public health crisis that brings home how interconnected we are. It is our collective responsibility to act rapidly and in solidarity.

As grassroots and faith-based organizations and religious leaders from across Central America, Mexico and the United States working to address the root causes of poverty, violence and corruption that force people to leave their homes, we offer this framework for action to protect migrants and refugees and help all of our communities survive this crisis and rebuild with justice and equity.

1. We demand the rapid, safe and orderly release of as many migrants and asylum seekers from detention as possible

- a. Identify and prioritize the immediate release of those at risk due to underlying medical conditions or age.
- b. No migrant should be detained in a facility that is unable to follow required COVID-19 prevention steps.
- c. Those managing detention centers must identify, protect and refer those suspected of being ill to specialized health care services.

2. Take immediate steps to slow the spread of the virus in refugee camps, migrant shelters and detention centers

- a. Officials and others who are responsible for the management of facilities sheltering refugees and migrants should receive the information, advice and support necessary in order to follow WHO recommended protocols for preventing the spread of COVID-19, including providing staff and those detained with clean water, soap, sanitizer, cleaning supplies and protective equipment.
- b. Public health officials should carry out appropriate testing, ensure suitably equipped quarantine areas and provide adequate medical care and treatment, as well as a referral system for the sick to specialized hospitals.

- c. Governments should provide appropriate financial and medical support to migrant shelters, while respecting their legitimate autonomy. These shelters provide indispensable services by providing hospitality to numerous vulnerable and at-risk people, including families, children and adolescents.
- d. Governments must guarantee the protection of the rights of migrants in quarantine, including adequate medical attention, until they can be released and returned safely.

3. Provide migrants and refugees equitable access to prevention, testing, treatment and emergency support

- a. There can be no discrimination in access to accurate public health information and resources and protocols for preventing the spread of COVID-19. Immigrants and refugees must receive testing and treatment if they become sick, at no cost and without barriers.
- b. No one should be punished, detained or deported because they are ill or suspected of being ill.
- c. Programs that provide emergency food and other aid to those unemployed and suffering as a result of the pandemic must include migrants and refugees, regardless of immigration status.

4. Guarantee the right to asylum

- a. Countries must continue to allow the entrance of asylum-seekers under international law.
- b. Governments should offer integral assistance to and guarantee the human rights of migrants and asylum seekers, including those being repatriated.
- c. Rather than blanket exclusion of asylum-seekers, countries should use public health protocols, including screening, testing, quarantine and self-isolation.
- d. We call for the immediate suspension of the 'Remain in Mexico' Program or the 'Migrant Protection Protocols', allowing asylum-seekers to stay in the United States, with due protections against the pandemic.

5. Make immediate and large-scale investments in public health systems and food and income support for vulnerable families

- Central America and Mexico urgently need more financial resources from regional, international and United States aid agencies to strengthen public health systems, including testing, the provision of personal protective equipment and training for health workers, specialized equipment for pandemic care, as well as support to hospitals and other facilities to isolate and treat people who contract COVID-19.

We call for an international solidarity that promotes the economic recovery of the countries of the region while supporting the human and integral development of the most vulnerable families and communities.

ENDORSERS:

Organizations

Faith in Action

Hope Border Institute

Catholic Relief Services

La 72, Hogar – Refugio para Personas Migrantes

Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña (OFRANEH)

Justicia, Paz y Integridad de Creación (JPIC)/Honduras

Centinelas por la Dignificación del Estado

Comunidades de Fe Organizadas en Acción (COFOA)

Congregation Action Network

New Mexico CAFé

Catholic Labor Network

Catholic Charities of Southern New Mexico

Christian Community Development Association

Coalición Pro defensa del Migrante AC / Baja California Norte

Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach

Comisión de Justicia, Paz e Integridad de la Creación de CONFREGUA

Comisión de Justicia, Paz e Integridad de la Creación de las Conferencias de

Commission on Migration of the Diocese of El Paso

Religiosas y Religiosos de Centroamérica y México (CONFERCAM)

Derechos Humanos Integrales en Acción, A.C.

Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries

Faith in Public Life

Holy Name Province, Franciscan Friars, NY, NY

Ignatian Solidarity Network / La Red de Solidaridad Ignaciana
Inner Change
Jesuit Conference Office of Justice and Ecology
JPIC Familia Franciscana Guatemala
JPIC - Misioneros Claretianos
Kino Border Initiative
Migrant & Refugee Services, Diocese of El Paso
La Red Jesuita con Migrantes Guatemala
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA
National Justice for Our Neighbors
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Pastoral de Movilidad Humana - Honduras
Pax Christi International
Pax Christi USA
Presbyterian Church (USA)
Red CLAMOR
Red Franciscana de Atención a Migrantes-Honduras
Red Franciscana para Migrantes
Scalabrinianas Misión con Migrantes y Refugiados (SMR)
School Sisters of Notre Dame, Central Pacific Province
Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes México
Sisters of Loretto/Loretto Community
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas – Justice Team
Somos Uno por Juarez
Stuart Center
Union of Sisters of the Presentation of BVM (USA Province)

Religious Leaders

Bishop Mark Seitz, Diocese of El Paso
Cardinal Álvaro Ramazzini Imeri, Diocese of Huehuetenango
Cardinal Joseph Tobin, Archdiocese of Newark
Archbishop John Wester, Archdiocese of Santa Fe
Archbishop Charles Thompson, Archdiocese of Indianapolis
Bishop José Raúl Vera López, Diocese de Saltillo
Bishop Edward Weisenburger, Diocese of Tucson
Bishop John Stowe, Diocese of Lexington
Bishop Oscar Cantú, Diocese of San Jose
Bishop Emeritus Ricardo Ramirez
Bishop Emeritus Gerald Kicanas

Rev. Scott Santarosa, S.J., Provincial, Society of Jesus, Jesuits West

Individuals and Clergy

Irma A. Velasquez Nimatuj, Profesora Invitada, Universidad de Stanford

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Rev. Deborah Clugy Soto, President of the Interfaith Alliance of the Southwest

Hna. Magdalena Silva Rentería. Casa de Acogida Formación y Empoderamiento de la Mujer Migrante y Refugiada (CAFEMIN)

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Rabbi Jeremy Kridel

Rev. Dr. Matt Braddock

John Gehring, Catholic program director, Faith in Public Life

Rev. Charlene Belsom Zellmer, Congregation Action Network

Cynthia Lapp, pastor, Hyattsville Mennonite Church

Fray Gonzalo Ituarte, O.P., Parroquia Universitaria

Rev. Peter Jarrett Schell