

Letter to Speaker of the House of Representatives John A. Boehner, Senate Majority Leader Harry M. Reid, Senate Minority Leader A. Mitchell McConnell, and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi on Efforts To Address the Humanitarian Situation in the Río Grande Valley Areas of the United States-Mexico Border

*June 30, 2014*

*Dear Speaker Boehner, Senator Reid, Senator McConnell, and Representative Pelosi:*

I am writing to update you on my Administration's efforts to address the urgent humanitarian situation in the Río Grande Valley areas of our Nation's Southwest border, and to request that the Congress support the new tools and resources we need to implement a unified, comprehensive Federal Government response.

While overall apprehensions across our entire border have only slightly increased during this time period and remain at near historic lows, we have seen a significant rise in apprehensions and processing of children and individuals from Central America who are crossing into the United States in the Río Grande Valley areas of the Southwest border. The individuals who embark upon this perilous journey are subject to violent crime, abuse, and extortion as they rely on dangerous human smuggling networks to transport them through Central America and Mexico.

My Administration continues to address this urgent humanitarian situation with an aggressive, unified, and coordinated Federal response on both sides of the border. Earlier this month, I directed the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency to coordinate this Government-wide response. This includes fulfilling our legal and moral obligation to make sure we appropriately care for unaccompanied children who are apprehended, while taking aggressive steps to surge resources to our Southwest border to deter both adults and children from this dangerous journey, increase capacity for enforcement and removal proceedings, and quickly return unlawful migrants to their home countries.

Specifically, the Department of Justice (DOJ) and DHS are deploying additional en-

forcement resources—including immigration judges, Immigration and Customs Enforcement attorneys, and asylum officers—to focus on individuals and adults traveling with children from Central America and entering without authorization across the Southwest border. Part of this surge will include detention of adults traveling with children, as well as expanded use of the Alternatives to Detention program, to avoid a more significant humanitarian situation. The DHS is working to secure additional space that satisfies applicable legal and humanitarian standards for detention of adults with children. This surge of resources will mean that cases are processed fairly and as quickly as possible, ensuring the protection of asylum seekers and refugees while enabling the prompt removal of individuals who do not qualify for asylum or other forms of relief from removal. Finally, to attack the criminal organizations and smuggling rings that are exploiting these individuals, we are surging law enforcement task forces in cooperation with our international partners, with a focus on stepped-up interdiction and prosecution.

To address the root causes of migration and stem the flow of adults and unaccompanied children into the United States, we are also working closely with our Mexican and Central American partners. Two weeks ago, at my direction, the Vice President convened leaders from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, as well as Mexico, to discuss our shared responsibility for promoting security, and agree on concrete ways that we can work together to stem the flow of migrants taking the dangerous trip to the United States. These countries committed to working together and with the United States to address the immediate humanitarian crisis as well as the long-term challenges. On Tuesday, Secretary Kerry will meet with the

leaders of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to follow up on the items agreed to in the Vice President's trip, and next week, Secretary Johnson will travel to Guatemala. I also spoke with Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto about our shared responsibility to promote security in both our countries and the region. As part of this effort, the United States committed foreign assistance resources to improve capacity of these countries to receive and reintegrate returned individuals and address the underlying security and economic issues that cause migration. This funding will enable El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to improve their existing repatriation processes and increase the capacity of these governments and nongovernmental organizations to provide expanded services to returned migrants. Additional resources will support community policing and law enforcement efforts to combat gang violence and strengthen citizen security in some of the most violent communities in these countries.

Finally, we are working with our Central American partners, nongovernmental organizations, and other influential voices to send a clear message to potential migrants so that they understand the significant dangers of this journey and what they will experience in the United States. These public information campaigns make clear that recently arriving individuals and children will be placed into removal proceedings, and are not eligible for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals process and earned citizenship provisions that are part of comprehensive immigration reform currently under consideration in the Congress. The Vice President made this clear in his public and private events on June 20, I addressed this last week in an interview, and we will continue to use multiple channels to counteract the misinformation that is being spread by smugglers.

While we are working across all of these channels, to execute a fully effective Government-wide strategy as the influx of migrants continues, we are eager to work with the Congress to ensure that we have the legal authorities to maximize the impact of our efforts. Initially, we believe this may include:

- providing the DHS Secretary additional authority to exercise discretion in processing the return and removal of unaccompanied minor children from non-contiguous countries like Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador; and
- increasing penalties for those who smuggle vulnerable migrants, like children.

In addition, we will request congressional action on emergency supplemental appropriations legislation to support:

- an aggressive deterrence strategy focused on the removal and repatriation of recent border crossers;
- a sustained border security surge through enhanced domestic enforcement, including interdiction and prosecution of criminal networks;
- a significant increase in immigration judges, reassigning them to adjudicate cases of recent border crossers, and establishing corresponding facilities to expedite the processing of cases involving those who crossed the border in recent weeks;
- a stepped up effort to work with our Central American partners to repatriate and reintegrate migrants returned to their countries, address the root causes of migration, and communicate the realities of these dangerous journeys; and
- the resources necessary to appropriately detain, process, and care for children and adults.

My Administration will be submitting a formal detailed request when the Congress returns from recess, and I look forward to working with you to address this urgent situation as expeditiously as possible.

Sincerely,

BARACK OBAMA

NOTE: The letter referred to Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh C. Johnson.