



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE | January 25, 2019

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NEW POLICY WILL KEEP ASYLUM SEEKERS IN MEXICO

The Tahirih Justice Center is deeply concerned by this administration's intensifying attack on our nation's asylum system and its impact on individuals fleeing gender-based violence. The latest came last night with the announcement of a new Remain in Mexico policy on top of legal decisions such as that in *Matter of A-B-*. These policies violate longstanding U.S. domestic and international legal obligations to provide safe haven to those fleeing life-threatening violence at home.

"The administration is attempting to singlehandedly rewrite laws and freeze out asylum seekers from the protections to which they are entitled," said Archi Pyati, Tahirih's Chief of Policy. "Its misguided actions are crippling the immigration system with dire consequences for immigrants, asylum seekers, and taxpayers, and demonstrate a complete lack of concern for the safety of survivors of violence, turning back decades of U.S. commitment to uphold international standards for human rights."

As a nonpartisan, national organization that has assisted nearly 25,000 immigrant survivors of gender-based violence such as human trafficking, domestic violence, and sexual assault over the past 21 years, Tahirih is certain that the Remain in Mexico policy will have serious negative impacts for asylum seekers. The Remain in Mexico policy would force asylum seekers to remain in Mexico while awaiting their court dates in the U.S. Asylum seekers will not be able to access trained attorneys to assist them in navigating complex legal cases, which will cause the majority to lose their cases even if they qualify under the law. Furthermore, they may be unsafe while waiting in Mexico before they can get to safety in the U.S.

"This is a dark day for America. Never before have we taken such a boldly unwelcoming, un-American, and illegal step to keep out people who need our help," said Pyati. "As our nation has evolved and learned from past mistakes, our government has historically recognized the need to provide relief from violence and a clear path to safety for asylum seekers. It is shameful to dial back progress and put into question whether human beings are entitled to safety."

In December, Tahirih attorneys traveled to Mexico to speak with survivors staying at a temporary shelter. They had tried to request asylum at the U.S. port of entry as permitted by law, but were turned away. One woman we spoke with described how she fled Central America after suffering years of abuse by her husband. She endured regular beatings and rapes, with her husband becoming increasingly violent toward both her and their children. She fled to Mexico and applied for humanitarian relief. However, several weeks later, her husband was able to locate her from thousands of miles away. He had an associate violently attack her and their children near the shelter in Mexico.

While en route to seek safety in the U.S., women and girls also face alarming threats of rape, kidnapping, and other crime in Mexico unrelated to prior persecution. Below is a very small sample of our clients' stories:

- A 20-year-old Honduran woman seeking asylum in the U.S. was raped in Mexico after fleeing her country with her two young sons, ages 2 and 4.

Tahirih Justice Center is a national non-profit that protects courageous immigrant women and girls who refuse to be victims of violence through free legal and social services, public policy advocacy, and training and education. Through our specialized Forced Marriage Initiative (FMI), Tahirih is leading efforts at the state and federal levels to tackle forced marriage as a domestic problem impacting women and girls in the United States. Visit www.tahirih.org or www.preventforcedmarriage.org for more information.



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- A 19-year-old Salvadoran asylum seeker fleeing with her younger brother was kidnapped in Mexico by the Gulf Cartel, and was sexually assaulted by one of her kidnappers.
- A 16-year-old Honduran girl was raped and sex trafficked in Mexico and is seeking relief in the U.S. as a survivor of human trafficking.
- A 17-year-old Honduran girl, a 16-year-old Guatemalan girl, and a 15-year-old Guatemalan girl, who all qualified for asylum but secured lawful status as Special Immigrant Juveniles, were raped in Mexico after fleeing their home countries.

Examples of alarming violence while asylum seekers are en route to the U.S. in Mexico abound. Survivors of gender-based violence are in dire need of trauma-informed mental health services, as well as access to counsel. Waiting weeks or months in Mexico without such access prolongs the healing process for both survivors and their children, delays their ability to make informed decisions about their legal options and next steps, and risks compounding existing trauma by exposing them to additional threats of violence.

Since the former Attorney General issued the decision in *Matter of A-B-*, Tahirih has witnessed first-hand the direct and grave consequences of this barrage of policies targeting asylum seekers. Our clients, women fleeing severe domestic violence, trafficking, and sexual assault, have been separated from their children, detained for long periods of time, and are losing their cases even though they merit asylum under previously settled law. Hundreds of hours of legal work are going into appeals, and the system is being flooded and further bogged-down.

About the Tahirih Justice Center

The Tahirih Justice Center is the largest national direct service and policy advocacy organization focused on assisting immigrant women and girls fleeing violence. Tahirih will continue to monitor policy shifts that impact women and girls fleeing violence and advocate for the United States to honor its legal obligations to protect those fleeing human rights abuses.

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