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U.S. Asylum Deterrence Policies Increase Risk of Gender-Based Violence

Washington, D.C — A new report by Oxfam America and the Tahirih Justice Center documents how common it is for migrants seeking asylum to experience gender-based violence in Mexico while waiting to access the asylum process in the U.S.

In *Surviving Deterrence: How U.S. Asylum Deterrence Policies Normalize Gender-Based Violence*, Oxfam America and Tahirih explain how U.S. asylum deterrence policies, such as border closures and expulsions, exacerbate conditions that cause gender-based violence to proliferate at the southern border. The report further asserts that survivors who do manage to apply for asylum face an inequitable and re-traumatizing process on a systemic level.

“The risk of violence at the border for women, girls, and LGBTQI+ people is so high that they have reportedly come to expect it as a condition of seeking asylum in the U.S.,” said Irena Sullivan, Senior Immigration Policy Counsel at the Tahirih Justice Center. “By abandoning its punitive, deterrence-based approach to asylum, the U.S. can uphold its legal and moral obligations to protect rather than endanger those who are particularly vulnerable to begin with.”

“Racialized policies of migration deterrence, which have become the cornerstone of US asylum and immigration policies, actively increase the risk of gender-based violence for women, girls, and LGBTQI+ individuals seeking asylum at the US southern border,” said Sara Duvisac, Research and Policy Advisor and ACLS/Mellon Public Fellow at Oxfam America. “The US asylum system, rather than protecting the most vulnerable, often systematically harms those seeking protection, in gendered and racialized ways.”

The report lists a set of recommendations for how the U.S. government can replace its punitive, deterrence-based approach to asylum with one that centers those in need of protection. For example, in place of deterrence policies, the report urges the U.S. to invest in ‘Welcome Centers,’ where asylum seekers can access legal and humanitarian

resources. It must also fully implement robust trauma-informed policies and practices across all U.S. agencies that interface with those seeking asylum. Other recommendations include eradicating racial bias across all U.S. immigration agencies, explicitly recognizing gender as an independent ground of asylum, supporting alternative pathways for processing refugees, and aligning U.S. immigration and asylum policies with U.S. foreign policy goals that seek to promote women's economic and social empowerment.

Authors of the report are available for further comments:

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Service providers that were part of the report are available for further comments:

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The **Tahirih Justice Center** is a national, nonprofit organization that serves immigrant survivors of gender-based violence. By amplifying the experiences of survivors in communities, courts, and Congress, Tahirih's mission is to create a world in which all people share equal rights and live in safety and with dignity.

Oxfam is an international confederation of 21 organizations, working with its partners and allies, reaching out to millions of people around the world. Together, we tackle inequalities to end poverty and injustice, now and in the long term—for an equal future.