

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Trump Launches Attack on Refugee Women

**Washington, D.C. (July 18, 2025)** – Today, the Justice Department issued a [precedential decision](#) that attempts to turn back the clock on progress made in recognizing women's rights as human rights. In *Matter of K-E-S-G-*, the Board of Immigration Appeals ignores and distorts decades of precedent to declare that women and girls fleeing human rights violations and seeking safety in the United States may no longer qualify for asylum.

Under our laws, judges are still required to consider each asylum claim on a case-by-case basis, and people fleeing gender-based persecution can still qualify for protection. However, by singling out women's asylum claims, the Justice Department's transparent intent is to give immigration judges a basis to reject women's claims without considering them fairly, sending a signal that they should not take these cases seriously.

The Board's decision in *K-E-S-G-* attempts to wipe out over [30 years](#) of positive U.S. jurisprudence on gender-based asylum claims, from the seminal *Matter of Kasinga* case, which was successfully litigated by CGRS Director Karen Musalo and sparked the founding of both CGRS and the Tahirih Justice Center. In declaring that women generally are not recognizable as a "particular social group" – one of the legal grounds upon which a person can qualify for refugee protection – the Board reaches a conclusion at odds with international refugee norms, and with the norms of peer countries which have long recognized gender-based persecution as a basis for asylum.

"With the stroke of a pen, the administration is attempting to erase decades of progress and drag us back to an era where the persecution of women and girls was seen as inevitable and irrelevant to our refugee protection system," **Blaine Bookey, Legal Director of the Center for Gender & Refugee Studies (CGRS)**, said today. "But Trump's Justice Department cannot distort the law to achieve its political ends. We will continue to fight for our client and for all women and girls who turn to the United States for refuge, who have a legal right to seek asylum and have their claims considered fairly under our laws."

"Today's decision by the Board of Immigration Appeals in *Matter of K-E-S-G-* goes against long-accepted precedent in cases involving women seeking protection from domestic and sexual violence," said **Kursten Phelps, litigation counsel at the Tahirih Justice Center**. "The result could be traumatized women being forced to return to life-threatening situations. The Tahirih Justice Center will continue to fight for the rights of survivors like our client, Ms. S.G., to access legal protection and safety in this country."

*Matter of K-E-S-G-* is the case of a Salvadoran woman, Ms. S.G., who fled to the United States after being stalked and threatened by powerful gang members, from whom the police refused to protect her. The Justice Department under the administration's first term had a pattern of weaponizing [individual asylum cases](#) like Ms. S.G.'s to restrict protections for women and families more broadly. Ms. S.G. is represented by CGRS, the Tahirih Justice Center, the Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinic, and Maya Lugasy, Senior Attorney with Brown Immigration Law.

"This misguided decision is another unlawful attempt by this administration to eviscerate asylum law," said **Sabi Ardalan, Director of the Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinic**. "The U.S. asylum system protects women, like Ms. S.G., who are forced to flee their home countries because of gender-based violence. This decision does not and cannot undo the United States' longstanding commitment to provide a safe haven for asylum seekers, like Ms. S.G."

### **About CGRS**

The Center for Gender & Refugee Studies (CGRS) defends the human rights of courageous refugees seeking asylum in the United States. With strategic focus and unparalleled legal expertise, CGRS champions the most challenging cases, fights for due process, and promotes policies that deliver safety and justice for refugees.

### **About the Tahirih Justice Center**

The Tahirih Justice Center is a national, nonprofit organization that serves women, girls, and all immigrant survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of gender-based violence. By amplifying the experiences of survivors, Tahirih's mission is to create a world in which all people share equal rights and live in safety and with dignity.

### **About the Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinic**

The Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinical Program seeks to advance immigrants' rights through clinical education. Working closely with clinical supervisors, law students in the Program take the lead in representing low-income immigrants who are fighting deportation and seeking immigration status in the United States.