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Inhumane Treatment of Children at U.S. Border Poses Broad, Lifelong Consequences

Richmond, VA – ChildFund International calls for an end to violence against children anywhere in the world, including the dehumanizing conditions that Central American refugee children face while in detention at the U.S. border.

“Right now, children from Central America are trapped in a violent reality that spans from their home countries all the way to the U.S. border,” says Anne Lynam Goddard, ChildFund President and CEO. “The maltreatment they’ve faced on coming here compounds the trauma they’ve already suffered.”

The children currently waiting at the U.S. border have fled violence and poverty in their homelands to find not refuge but, instead, crowded conditions, poor sanitation, inadequate food and, worst of all, separation from their families. The entire journey has caused them prolonged toxic stress, which, research shows, poses dire consequences to their development, especially for the youngest.

Goddard notes that the children’s situation, past and present, lays the groundwork for a future crisis that will unfold as the children grow up, whether they are returned to their countries or move on to live in the U.S. “Without the opportunity to grow up safe and healthy,” she says, “without the love and guidance of their family, children’s emotional and cognitive development and their future health are at serious risk. And that will mean greater hardships for them, no matter where they are.”

ChildFund has worked for decades in Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico to address the root causes of migration so that children and families can create greater opportunity and safety within their own communities.

“Few people want to abandon their life in their home country,” says Goddard. “Parents in particular are trying to find a way to provide a safe upbringing for their children, and their leaving means there is no other choice for them — it’s the only way left for them to give their children a better life.

“I ask my fellow Americans to pay attention,” she adds. “Don’t let yourselves become numb to the horrible things that keep happening to our fellow human beings, especially children. If we fail to remember their humanity, we risk losing our own.”

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ChildFund International works throughout Asia, Africa and the Americas — including the United States — to create lasting, positive change for children. Our programs address the underlying conditions that prevent children and youth from achieving their full potential. Last year, we reached 10.5 million children and family members. Approximately 200,000 Americans support our work by sponsoring individual children or investing in ChildFund programs. Find out more at www.ChildFund.org.