



## **ISSUE BRIEF**

**April 2018**

### **Central American Human Rights and Asylum-Seekers**

Violence and human rights abuses have forced thousands of Central Americans to flee their homes in recent years— with a marked increase in forced migration since 2014. The Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala have some of the highest homicide rates in the world. A lack of adequate human rights protections, rampant extortion, extrajudicial killings, and widespread impunity also fuel displacement.

To protect human rights and address this humanitarian crisis, the United States must shift its approach. In Honduras, the U.S. has provided funding to law enforcement and military units responsible for serious human rights violations. The U.S. Department of State approved further security assistance to the government just days after disputed election results in November 2017. Since the election, Honduran security forces have killed at least 16 people involved in protests against the government and detained more than 1,300 for violating a state-imposed curfew.

At the U.S.-Mexico border, U.S. officials have frequently sought to penalize asylum-seekers from Central America, effectively denying humanitarian protection. Reports by independent NGOs working on the border show a major spike under this administration in criminal prosecutions of asylum-seekers—merely for crossing the border. Punishing people for seeking refuge is a violation of human rights and is often compounded by unnecessary family separation, prolonged detention, and wrongful deportation.

Finally, by canceling Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for almost 200,000 Salvadorans the Trump administration threatens to deport people to unsafe conditions and create further instability in the region. Nearly 60,000 Honduran nationals face an uncertain future as well, as the administration decides whether to renew or terminate their status on May 4, 2018.

Congress has the power to reverse these trends. Senators can appropriate funding to support programs that assist asylum-seekers and refugees, create pathways to permanent status for many TPS holders, and ensure that U.S. tax dollars do not fund human rights violations in Central America.

#### **Unitarian Universalist Service Committee Recommendations**

- 1. Ensure FY19 appropriations legislation protects the rights of Central Americans and asylum-seekers, by:**
  - Providing robust funding for refugee-related accounts in FY19 appropriations, per amounts recommended in the Dear Colleague letter led by Sen. Blumenthal that was submitted to the Senate Appropriations Committee on March 26, 2018.
  - Denying appropriation of increased funding requested in the President's budget request for additional detention capacity, deportation officers, and the hiring of new U.S. Attorneys to prosecute non-violent immigration offenses.
  - Suspending U.S. military and security assistance to the government of Honduras until the government recognizes the rights to assembly and expression and investigates and prosecutes human rights violations against protesters.
  
- 2. Support a permanent solution for TPS holders from El Salvador and Honduras, by co-sponsoring the SECURE Act (S. 2144) which provides permanent protections to long-term TPS holders.**

**UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERVICE COMMITTEE**

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