



# National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **More than 100 Human Rights Groups Call Upon U.S. & Mexican Border Region Governments to Ensure Health and Safety of Migrants, Refugees, and Local Communities During this Global Health Crisis.**

El Paso, TX -- In the last weeks, numerous incidents of COVID-19 infection have been reported in detention centers, migrant camps, and maquiladoras along the US-Mexico border. While the Trump administration continues to scapegoat migrants with the announcement last night of an imminent Executive Order to suspend all immigration to the US, a consortium of human rights and humanitarian organizations call upon border Mayors and local government officials to enact protections that will help save lives of migrants, refugees, and children caught in vulnerable situations while upholding human rights and international laws.

The signing organizations express deep concern over the conditions in detention centers and join public health experts, and other civil society groups to call on local authorities to advocate for the release of all people from detention and take immediate measures to safely and humanely decongest camp-like settings where physical distancing is an impossibility. The combination of the current global pandemic, along with the humanitarian crisis created by federal immigration policy threatens the lives of thousands of internationally displaced people in overcrowded shelters and camps in Mexico, while detention center outbreaks and systematic deportations of COVID-19 positive people are cause for serious alarm in the United States.

The letter calls upon local governments to enact recommendations and follow human rights guidelines to remove obstacles that discriminate against migrants, refugees and their families residing in our cities and communities. The letter also urges local officials on both sides of the border

to guarantee access “to healthcare, emergency services, and shelter without discrimination, and work with the federal officials to suspend travel restrictions at checkpoints that impede access to hospitals and critical services.” Other recommendations include protecting the labor rights of all workers, including migrants -- many of whom are performing “essential” jobs for the border community -- and creating safeguards against coerced labor, wage theft, or reprisals for refusing to work in unsafe conditions.

This consortium urges local cities to immediately protect migrants in vulnerable groups including pregnant women, people with chronic illnesses and the elderly and advocate for the release of unaccompanied children to their families and custodians to prevent widespread infection. Any public health initiative that excludes migrant communities puts the entire border region at risk.

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