

The Honorable Gregory Meeks  
Chairman  
House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Michael McCaul  
Ranking Member  
House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Meeks and Ranking Member McCaul,

Violence against women and children in Central America continues to be a driver of irregular migration from the region, while also perpetuating cycles of instability and poverty in communities throughout the region. In 2020, Honduras and El Salvador were among the three countries with the highest numbers of femicides per 100,000 women in Latin America.<sup>1</sup> In Guatemala, 300 women were killed between January and July 2021, alone.<sup>2</sup> El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras all have legal protections and support for women and girls impacted by violence, but “lack of enforcement, corruption, and serious resource challenges regularly undermine access to justice for women within the region, reinforcing a cycle of inequity and gender-based violence”, according to a December 2021 report by the George W. Bush Institute.<sup>3</sup> These challenges, in turn, lead to limited economic development, as well as a cycle of violence and destabilization throughout this region. **To address these needs, we urge you to advance and pass the *Central America Women and Children Protection Act*.**

*The Central America Women and Children Protection Act* would authorize the establishment of bilateral compacts between the US government and the governments of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador to create and implement action plans to address the pervasive violence against women and children that often drives them to seek asylum in the United States. **These agreements would support crucial capacity building of the public justice system, bringing needed stabilization, while protecting the most vulnerable populations suffering violence in Central America.**

This bill was originally considered for inclusion in the FY22 National Defense Authorization Act but was omitted in the final amendment package. We ask that this legislation no longer be delayed so that women and children in Central America can receive urgently needed protections. Importantly, this would help relieve the surge of arrivals at the southern border to United States, while also bringing increased stability to a strategically important region for the U.S. economy and future security.

As organizations comprised of faith-based professionals, we believe that all people are made in the image of God and as such, deserve dignity and safety from harm. We are explicitly called to care for the vulnerable including widows, orphans, immigrants, and people living in poverty. We also believe that any form of nativism, mistreatment, or exploitation of the vulnerable is inconsistent with this admonition. Notably, much of the aid provided to these Central American populations comes from faith-based organizations. Thank you for your consideration of this bill which will fund both safety and justice for our neighbors in Central America, as well as enhanced security for the United States. We welcome

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<sup>1</sup> <https://oig.cepal.org/en/indicators/femicide-or-feminicide>

<sup>2</sup> María José España, “El 70% de las denuncias por violencia contra la mujer sigue sin resolverse,” Prensa Libre, July 16, 2021, <https://www.prensalibre.com/guatemala/comunitario/el-70-por-ciento-de-lasdenuncias-por-violencia-contra-la-mujer-sigue-sin-resolverse/>.

<sup>3</sup>

<https://www.bushcenter.org/publications/resources-reports/reports/gender-based-violence-and-migration-central-america.html>

continued communication and would be honored to meet with you or your staff to answer your questions.

Sincerely,

Bethany Christian Services

Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

International Justice Mission

National Association of Evangelicals

World Relief

World Vision