

# Human Rights Watch

## Children's Rights

**<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/10/10/us-proposal-would-sacrifice-central-americas-children>**

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Turning Children Back at US Border One Condition for Keeping Dreamers

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The Trump administration [announced on Sunday](#) that it wants Central American children even those fleeing for their lives to be turned away at the US-Mexico border or quickly sent back to their home countries. This was one of several conditions the administration cast as prerequisites for any legislative deal to protect the Dreamers, undocumented immigrants brought to the United States as children.

Another of Trumps demands would mean that instead of being interviewed by an asylum officer, child asylum seekers would be thrown immediately into immigration courts where they would be pitted against a government trial attorney a difficult situation for anyone, let alone a child.

Theres something deeply cynical about endangering one group of children as a condition for protecting another.

Reading these demands, I thought of the soft-spoken 16-year-old Salvadoran boy I met in California. Eddie (not his real name) told me he left his home because I had a problem with the gang. More accurately, the gang had a problem with him he repeatedly ducked their requests to join, and they gave him an ultimatum: The next time they saw him, he would either join them or be killed.

Over the past two years Ive interviewed nearly 100 Central American children like Eddie. Girls as young as 14 told me they escaped gang members who threatened to kill them or their families if they didnt become their girlfriends or sell drugs for them. Boys said local gangs demanded part of their meagre earnings more than they could afford for working in their territory. Gangs also threatened to kill them, accusing them of associating with rival gangs, and tried to recruit them against their will.

Its not enough to say authorities in Central America should address gang violence. Local police are demonstrably unable to protect these children and frequently unwilling to do so lest they become targets themselves.

Nor is it realistic to suggest that Mexico can protect these children. Mexico [recognized just 130 unaccompanied Central American children as refugees in 2016](#), less than 1 percent of the [more than 17,000 unaccompanied children from those countries who were apprehended](#) during the year. And this is just a fraction of the likely need. The [UN High Commissioner for Refugees has estimated that as many as half](#) of the unaccompanied children who arrive in Mexico from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras have plausible asylum claims.

Proposing that the US send back children fleeing for their lives is cruel. Lawmakers shouldnt accept a false choice between protecting Dreamers and other children arriving in search of safety. In fact, theres every reason for Congress to protect both groups.

Human Rights Watch / ACLU Joint Submission Regarding the United States Record Under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

Asylum Seekers Abused in the US and Deported to Harm in Cameroon

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