

Cultural Survival

Indigenous Peoples' Rights

<https://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/separating-children-their-families-us-and-mexican-border-continuation-colonial-violence>

Campaign and Advocacy

Cultural Survival Condemns the Trump Administrations Policy of Separating Families at the Border

The Department of Homeland Security reported on June 15, 2018, that the Trump administration separated 1,995 children from the adults they were traveling with at the U.S. border between April 19 and May 31.

This forced removal of children from their families represents the continuity of a historical pattern of colonial violence carried out by the US government against Native Americans, African slaves, and now Latinxs and Indigenous Latinxs. The use of dehumanizing language as Trump referred to some people who illegally cross the border stating that these arent people these are animals, directly impacts policies. Japanese Americans were labelled as the enemy during World War II and corralled into internment camps.

Asylum-seekers at our borders are not breaking laws, nor are their children who accompany them. We deplore the Trump administrations dehumanizing and disparaging language categorizing people who are migrating as drug dealers, rapists, murderers, and animals.

We believe that all people should be treated with dignity and respect, no matter what their country of citizenship, their country of residence, their legal status, ethnicity, or their economic conditions. International human rights law was created to protect the most vulnerable populations, and the United States has a moral and legal obligation to treat with dignity any human beings fleeing conditions of violence and economic injustice.

Today, the vast majority of those crossing the US-Mexico border undocumented are coming from Central America, countries whose populations include high numbers of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous Peoples in Central America disproportionately experience extreme poverty and marginalization, and make up a large majority of those who choose to migrate. It is impossible to understand the current wave of migration from Central America without examining the context of extreme poverty, landlessness, discrimination, disenfranchisement, and colonial violence that Central Americans are facing in their home countries. We cannot ignore the role the United States government and industry has played and continues to play in facilitating this colonial violence, from the training of genocidal dictators by the US military at the School of the Americas, to American mining, oil and gas industries pushing Indigenous and campesino farmers off of the lands they used to provide food to their families. Central Americans continue to experience the repercussions in their lives as a result of foreign policy decisions made by the United States.

As a nation, we must acknowledge our shared history of state-sponsored colonial violence inflicted upon communities of color. Native Americans well remember the forced separation of families as their children were taken from their homes and placed in residential boarding schools. The US government operated as many as 100 boarding schools for American Indians, both on and off reservations, for over a century between 1877-1978. A US federal policy to assimilate Indians into mainstream society, the Indian boarding school schemes goal was to kill the Indian and save the man, by taking American Indian children from their homes, cutting their hair, and forcing them to speak only English. Many Native people continue to experience historical and intergenerational trauma because their parents and grandparents were separated from their relatives.

Zeid Raad al-Husseini, the United Nations high commissioner for human rights recently spoke out against Trumps policy of separation, announcing, The thought that any state would seek to deter parents by inflicting such abuse on children is unconscionable. Zeid Raad al-Husseini also cited a statement from the American Academy of Pediatrics about detaining children separately from their parents being government-sanctioned child abuse that could cause permanent and irreversible harm to children.

Even in 1941, in another dark chapter of US history, when Japan became the enemy overnight after Pearl Harbor and the internment of Japanese Americans began, children were still not stripped from their parents, they were not pulled screaming from their mothers arms as is being done today.

To be clear, no law exists that instructs border patrol to separate families; rather, the Justice Department has been instructed by Jeff Sessions to interpret the crossing of the border as a crime rather than a civil offense, meaning adults found crossing the border are being detained in jails rather than detention centers, and children are not allowed to be with their parents in jail. There is no law that says we must have zero tolerance for children at our borders. President Trump has a broad latitude in setting the priorities of law enforcement, and he is choosing to separate families. This policy decision can be stopped at any time by the president without legislation passed by congress.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a international human rights law which the United States signed in 1995 but remains the only country in the world not to ratify, states in Article 9: States Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, except when competent authorities subject to judicial review determine, in accordance with applicable law and

procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child. Such determination may be necessary in a particular case such as one involving abuse or neglect of the child by the parents, or one where the parents are living separately and a decision must be made as to the child's place of residence.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Article 7 states:

Indigenous Peoples have the collective right to live in freedom, peace and security as distinct peoples and shall not be subjected to any act of genocide or any other act of violence, including forcibly removing children of the group to another group.

The US federal policy separating children from their parents and families is an unconscionable human rights abuse carried out by the US government in our country today. Once again, the ideology of conquest, racism, greed, and difference fuels our government policy-making against those seeking freedom, justice and equality and the rights that every human being should be accorded no matter where they are. We only have to look at the history of this country building walls, fences, internment camps, concentration camps and slavery to understand the deep seated and dark side of power, racism, and control that we have yet to move beyond, and the reality of it happening again. We should not rest easy but stand up for those children and their mothers, grandmothers, fathers, grandfathers, sisters and brothers being separated, stated Cultural Survival Executive Director Suzanne Benally (Santa Clara Tewa/ Navajo).

Keep families together and stop criminally prosecuting and locking up asylum seekers in prisons.

[Urgent Action Needed on Five Bills Advancing Indigenous Peoples Rights in Massachusetts](#)

[Alcatraz Canoe Journey: A Perspective from Frontline Indigenous Activists](#)

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Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we are headquartered on [Massachusett land](#), in Cambridge, MA, and we thank the past and current Indigenous stewards of this land.

Cultural Survival advocates for Indigenous Peoples' rights and supports Indigenous communities self-determination, cultures and political resilience, since 1972.

Cultural Survival envisions a future that respects and honors Indigenous Peoples' inherent rights and dynamic cultures, deeply and richly interwoven in lands, languages, spiritual traditions, and artistic expression, rooted in self-determination and self-governance.

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