

Human Rights First

Discrimination, Detention, and Deportation: Immigration & Refugees

<https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/press-release/kelly-signals-dhs-will-not-separate-parents-and-children>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Work With Asylum Seekers

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Areas of Focus

Current Initiatives

Washington, D.C. Human Rights First today cautiously welcomed statements made by Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Kelly during Senate hearing confirming that the agency will not generally separate children from their parents.

The women and children who seek protection in the United States have already suffered immeasurable trauma, and we were glad to hear the secretary clarify that DHS will not be separating these vulnerable families but disheartened to hear there is no intention to put this policy in writing, said Human Rights First's **Eleanor Acer**. We call on the agency to put this policy in writing so that it can be faithfully executed across the board, and to abandon the harmful practice of sending families seeking asylum to immigration detention facilities.

On March 4 the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) expressed concern about DHS's consideration of separating families and called the use of vulnerable children as a tool of law enforcement harsh and counterproductive. The group noted that authorities must exercise caution to ensure that the emotional and physical stress children experience as they seek refuge in the United States is not exacerbated by the additional trauma of being separated from their parents. Stating that [c]hildren are not just little adults, the AAP stressed the necessity of keeping families together, explaining that at times of anxiety and stress, children need to be with their parents. UNICEF also weighed in, [calling](#) the proposal cruel and traumatic. Similarly, a DHS Advisory Committee [concluded](#) in September 2016 that the separation of families for purposes of immigration enforcement or management is never in the best interest of children, and that the separation of a parent and child should never be used as punishment or as a means of discouraging the exercise of rights.

Human Rights First today submitted a [statement for the record](#) to the Senate committee urging senators to question Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kelly on how he intends to safeguard U.S. borders while still upholding the United States legal commitments to protect refugees and asylum seekers.

As detailed by Human Rights First, policies that thwart access to asylum, undermine U.S. global leadership, and contravene U.S. legal and treaty commitments include:

The Department of Homeland Security can and must both safeguard U.S. borders and protect the persecuted. Secretary Kelly should take steps to ensure that all DHS officers understand that they must faithfully implement laws and policies relating to asylum, added Acer.

Published on April 5, 2017

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