As Western Buddhist leaders, we unreservedly condemn the recently imposed policy of separating immigrant children from their parents at the US-Mexican border.

Over the past few weeks, thousands of children have been inhumanely taken from their parents by US Customs and Border Protection, in a policy that has been condemned by the United Nations and many international human rights observers. Indeed, no other country has a policy of separating families who intend to seek asylum.

Whatever the legal status of those attempting to enter the US, separating children from their parents is a contravention of basic human rights. Parents seeking asylum make long, dangerous and arduous journeys in an attempt to find safety and well-being for their precious children. Ripping these vulnerable children from their parents is cruel, inhumane, and against the principles of compassion and mercy espoused by all religious traditions. From a Buddhist perspective, it is the close bond between parents and children that nurtures not only the physical well-being of children, but their psychological health and their moral formation.

Separating children from their parents and holding them in detention inflicts terrible and needless trauma and stress on young children that hampers and damages their development, causing long-term damage. This policy being employed on United States soil is morally unconscionable. That such egregious actions be employed as a deterrent for families seeking entry and/or asylum in the U.S. – using the sacred bond between innocent youth and their parents – is unjustifiable on any level. We suggest that our current defenders of this policy visit some of these border crossings and child detention centers so they can experience for themselves the present effects of their decisions. It is difficult to conceive that anyone having compassion for our world’s children and their families, and who witnesses such pain and anguish for themselves could continue to uphold such a practice.

As people of faith and conscience, we feel that it is important that we speak out clearly in defense of basic human rights at this time, calling for an immediate end to this heartless practice. In doing so, we join the voices of many religious leaders and congregations that have unreservedly condemned this policy of separation. This policy is a serious violation of the rights of the child and must be stopped today.
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