

March 13, 2017

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Northwest
Washington, DC 20003

Cc: Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, National Security Advisor

Dear President Trump,

We, the undersigned, represent a diverse group of organizations who work to end violence against women and girls globally. We are writing specifically as organizations engaged in the work to end violence against women and girls globally to express our serious concerns with the Executive Order Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States.

On March 6, 2017, you signed this Executive Order, which blocks nationals from six Muslim-majority countries (Iran, Sudan, Syria, Libya, Somalia, and Yemen) from entering the United States. It also continues the suspension of the refugee resettlement program in the United States for 120 days, “pending a review of our procedures, for screening and vetting refugees.” The Executive Order maintains the reduction of the maximum number of refugees whom the United States will resettle from 110,000 to 50,000 if and when resettlement is restarted.

In this Executive Order, violence against women is included as a focus of data collection related to the need for the travel ban and the refugee program suspension and to ensure that the United States “implement more effectively policies and practices that serve the national interest.” Per this order, the Secretary of Homeland Security, in consultation with the Attorney General, shall collect and make publicly available:

Sec. 11 (iii) information regarding the number and types of acts of gender-based violence against women, including so-called “honor killings,” in the United States by foreign nationals

Violence against women and girls is a global crisis, and we support the U.S. government working with other governments, with civil society, and within the U.S. government to help end such violence in all its forms. The United States playing a leadership role in ending gender-based violence is both a reflection of American values and helps make America and its allies more prosperous and secure as it has been established that violence against women and girls undermines the productivity, health, and stability of communities worldwide.

Specifically because of our commitment to end violence against women and girls globally, we are deeply concerned about the 120-day suspension of the refugee program and the impact of the travel ban on refugees and those seeking asylum from the six countries listed. These actions risk making women and

girls more vulnerable to violence rather than less vulnerable. Women and girls who are refugees and asylum seekers are at high risk for gender-based violence; they are extremely vulnerable to sexual assault, including rape, and they frequently face violence, assault, exploitation, and sexual harassment at every stage of their journey to safety. In the home, refugee camps, and shelters, they may lack security and social networks, leaving them vulnerable to violence and abuse. Many asylum seekers themselves are explicitly fleeing gender-based violence. Any shutdown of this program or ban restricting travel does not help make women and girls safer; it makes them more vulnerable, and it further endangers them.

As a global crisis, violence against women and girls is not specific to any one country. Connecting “gender-based violence against women and girls” with the travel ban and refugee program suspension is out of sync with the reality that every country, including the United States, suffers from such violence; it falsely suggests that refugees or people from the six Muslim-majority countries banned from entering the United States are somehow more likely to have engaged in violence against women or other persecution. Enacting a travel ban on these countries and suspending the refugee resettlement program does not address the global crisis of violence against women, neither does it offer any solutions to violence against women in the specifically targeted countries. An Executive Order that barred people from entering the United States from places where violence against women is a concern would mean a ban on travelers from every country, including the United States.

We are further concerned by the Executive Order’s singling out of so-called “honor killings” as a type of gender-based violence that is more deserving of concern than other types of violence. Gender-based violence occurs in many different forms in countries all around the world, including the United States. Specifically naming this type of violence in connection with the six Muslim-majority countries listed in the Executive Order not only promotes and inflames Islamophobia, but it further feeds into the false narrative that violence against women is specific to non-Western cultures.

We have serious concerns with this Executive Order, and we urge you to rescind the travel ban and refugee program suspension and to work with foreign governments, with civil society organizations, and within the U.S. government to seek meaningful solutions to ending violence against women and girls globally.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Youth
Alliance to End Slavery & Trafficking
Amara Legal Center
Amnesty International USA
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles
Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence
ASISTA

CARE USA
Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network
Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)
Church World Service
Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault
Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)
DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence
DC National Organization for Women
Emerge USA
Equality Now
Freedom Network USA
Frontera Immigration Law
Futures Without Violence
Genocide Watch
Global Rights for Women
Holdenried Law Office
Immigration Center for Women and Children
International Action Network for Gender Equity & Law (IANGEL)
International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)
International Rescue Committee
International Women's Health Coalition
Islamic Society of Boston
Islamic Society of North America
Jewish Women International (JWI)
Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing
Legal Aid at Work
Los Angeles Center for Law and Justice
MADRE
Muslim Public Affairs Council
National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
National Latina/o Psychological Association
National Organization for Women
Peace X Peace
Peaceful Families Project
Physicians for Human Rights
Poligon Education Fund
Population Institute
Promundo-US
Raksha, Inc
Rays of Freedom

Sanctuary for Families

The Nursing Network on Violence Against Women International (NNVAWI)

University of Tulsa College of Law, Tulsa Immigrant Resource Network

Women Thrive Alliance

Women Watch Afrika, Inc.

Women's Action for New Directions

Women's Refugee Commission

YWCA USA