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November 16, 2018

President Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump:

We, the Board of Directors of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP), wish to express deep concern and consternation over both the deployment of active duty troops to the U.S.-Mexico Border to counter a caravan of Central American migrants and the denial of asylum eligibility for refugees entering the country outside of an official port of entry. Both actions contribute to an already heightened climate of xenophobia in the United States and both raise questions about our adherence to the law, including international law, and commitment to human rights.

The deployment, called "Operation Faithful Patriot," occurred with little analysis, no long-term plan, and no effective arrangement for an end to the deployment. The deployment appears to ignore as well the fact that federal law limits what the military can do at the border, including prohibiting the military from engaging in law enforcement on U.S. soil. Further, Operation Faithful Patriot triggered calls from U.S.-based paramilitary groups to "protect" the border, leading to armed groups of citizens mobilizing to the border area in several states.

The deployment is based on unsubstantiated claims that the caravan is composed of gang members, middle-eastern terrorists, and "dangerous" and "rough" people. We are not being "invaded." Rather, the people in the caravan, many of them children, are individuals simply seeking asylum. In fact, they are fleeing intolerable conditions to which we, the United States, during both Republican and Democratic administrations, have contributed for over a century. Furthermore, urging our troops and law enforcement officials to treat rock throwing as if it is rifle fire serves only to make the situation on the border even more volatile, thereby endangering everyone's lives, including law enforcement's, even more.

It is our position that military personnel will not help in an already militarized border region. Rather, bringing in military personnel is likely to inflame an already delicate situation and to encourage violence. Operation Faithful Patriot appears to be less about security and more about politics. We agree with Senator Jack Reed when he states that,

Your decision to rush thousands of our troops to the border at this time seems politically motivated and fails to implement reasonable and appropriate steps to address the true nature of the problem.

The deployment of military personnel to the border will not achieve greater border security and the action does not reflect the basic founding principles of our country.

Regarding the recent directive permitting asylum eligibility only to refugees crossing the border at an official port of entry, we believe that this contravenes U.S. and international refugee law. Refugees fleeing for their lives are not always in the position to comply with all of the requirements for legal entry. Consequently, both international and U.S. law allow for entry outside official ports of entry. Article 31 of the Refugee Convention says that contracting states, of which the United States is one, "shall not impose penalties, on account of their illegal entry or presence, on refugees who, coming directly from a territory where their life or freedom was threatened in the sense of Article 1, enter or are present in their territory without authorization, provided they present themselves without delay to the authorities and show good cause for their illegal entry or presence." We are pleased that your proclamation refusing asylum has already been challenged in the Northern District Court of California, but even if the court rules in your favor, we urge you to reconsider your decision. Not to do so may result in the death of individuals looking for a safe haven at our doorsteps.

We respectfully request that you withdraw the deployment and asylum order as soon as possible. We also call for your administration and the U.S. Justice Department to terminate any collaboration between the U.S. Border Patrol and civil militias targeting migrants in the border region. Further, please join us in calling for an end to incendiary language that exacerbates the situation and further divides the nation. Words matter and we may have seen evidence of this recently in Pittsburgh.

As a professional organization, principally of scholars, including immigration scholars, we have the expertise to engage in this kind of a conversation in a meaningful way. Please feel free to engage with us on the subject.

Sincerely,



Nancy J. Mezey, Ph.D.
SSSP President, 2018-2019



Luis A. Fernandez, Ph.D.
SSSP Past President, 2018-2019



Héctor L. Delgado, Ph.D.
SSSP Executive Officer