Although the U.S. immigration officials have increasingly separated family members from one another in recent years, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kelly’s recent statements that he is considering separating migrant parents from their children in order to deter them from migrating in the first place demonstrates that the Trump administration is now formalizing a cruel practice into policy. Furthermore, to justify the shift by suggesting that such a move would reduce the danger that migrants face because of the “terribly dangerous network” they face along the route is completely misguided, as the policy would result in the opposite. Here’s why:

- **Separating families at the border will drive women and children who are fleeing horrific violence – and are already vulnerable to exploitation during their journey in seeking protection – only further into the hands of unscrupulous smugglers and traffickers.** Families will continue to flee because they have no other choice for survival. But rather than turning themselves in or presenting at a port of entry to seek asylum, they may try any alternative available to the possibility of separation. This means that they will likely fall victim even further to the very “terribly dangerous network” from which Sec. Kelly suggests he wants to shield migrants.

- **Separating children from parents is cruel. It traumatizes everyone involved.** In our detention center visits, WRC has already encountered individuals who were separated from their small children, desperate to understand what happened to them and how to contact them. And it will be especially traumatic for children. As the American Association of Pediatrics noted in a statement, authorities should “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 siblings, parents or other relatives and caregivers.” Furthermore, it goes against numerous principles in international law that family units should be respected.

- **Separating family members who are seeking asylum or other legal protection creates immense obstacles to pursuing that legal protection.** Children who would otherwise be linked to their parents’ asylum application may not be able to articulate details of an asylum claim and especially young children may not fully understand an asylum claim in the first place. Similarly, a parent’s claim may be linked to persecution against the very child from whom they have been separated. One parent or family member may have all of the relevant documents to establish identity or provide evidence to support an asylum claim that another family member cannot access if they are detained or being processed separately. Because DHS and ORR have essentially no meaningful mechanisms to coordinate communication between separated family members, their separation will not only be traumatic but also have profound consequences for their legal case.

- **Family detention is also not the answer.** It has long been shown that attempts to deter asylum seekers with detention are not only inconsistent with U.S. obligations under U.S. and international laws, they are also ineffective, and courts have ruled that families seeking asylum may not be detained for purposes of deterrence. WRC has spoken with countless detained asylum-seeking women who said that if faced with the same choice they would make it again, despite the traumatic treatment upon seeking protection. Individuals and families fleeing violence don’t make the decision to flee lightly; they do so only when they feel they have no other choice. The response should not be to try to deter them with detention or separation. Where needed, the government should turn to cost-effective alternatives to detention to release families to sponsors and communities from which they can present their case.

- **Unaccompanied children as young as babies will now be in Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) custody alone and possibly without a parent available for reunification.** Separating family members will create additional substantial burdens for ORR, which has custody over unaccompanied children. While ORR does have extensive experience caring for unaccompanied children, providing care for toddlers and babies will require significant additional resources. In addition, as parents will be in adult detention, the release and reunification process of children from ORR will be much more difficult. Ultimately, this may leave children needlessly lingering in detention while ORR works to find alternative and safe sponsors.

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