Dear Mr. President, August 19, 2014

I urge you to boldly and compassionately address the humanitarian crisis of the children fleeing violence in Central America.

The Vincentian Family is comprised of religious congregations and lay associations throughout the world, that were either founded by St. Vincent de Paul or that follow his spirit of service to the poor. Our main groups include the International Association of Charity or “Ladies of Charity”; the Congregation of the Mission (Vincentian priests); the Daughters of Charity, (religious sisters); the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. the Sisters of Charity (religious sisters); the Vincentian Marian Youth; the Miraculous Medal Association; MISEVI (Lay Vincentian Missionaries).

Hundreds of thousands of our USA members minister in Catholic schools, healthcare facilities and social work agencies. Some of our members went to the border to directly serve these children. We have heard the cries of the poor children on the border and we urge you to respond with mercy, a sense of duty for the helpless and the courageous leadership that have become hallmarks of the United States of America.

I exhort you to:

1. **Maintain and expand the protections within the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA)**

I strongly oppose the rollback of the protections afforded to children in TVPRA because it violates due process as well as obligations under international law. It also shames our nation. Protections offered through the Act should be maintained for the Central American children and expanded to include Mexican children.

1. **Respond to this humanitarian crisis in a humane manner.**

“Sealing” borders and incarcerating vulnerable children will not prevent a parent from trying to save his/her child’s life. ‘Sealing the border’ policies will only drive desperate people into more dangerous circumstances and inflict more pain upon those already suffering. I offer the following alternatives:

* Provide adequate time and legal counsel to all unaccompanied children.
* Expand community-based alternatives to detention programs, which are vastly more cost effective and humane than the failed practice of family detention.
* Provide unaccompanied children with adequate services, while maintaining funding and services for other groups under the care of the Office of Refugee Resettlement.

1. **The U.S. must also assist in treating the root causes of migration.** Our Catholic Social Justice teachings recognize that all people have inherent dignity and deserve to be free from unnecessary and dangerous risks to their health and well-being. Families have a right to be safe in their home country. As we move forward, I urge you to establish an unequivocal plan of action that will restore peace and economic opportunity into this region.

The United States of America has proudly led the world in prompt, global humanitarian response efforts. Yet, in this crisis, in our own back yard, we are failing to act from the very values that made us great. Instead, we entertain fears and envision ways to send little kids back into the burning building of abject poverty, unprecedented violence and uncontrollable corruption.

I thank you for your service and I implore you to “*Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”* Psalm82:3-4.

Sincerely,