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# Dear United States of America, We Are Children: Unaccompanied Minors at the U.S./Mexico Border

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Briana Dominguez  
05/15/2019

Dear United States of America, We Are Children:  
Unaccompanied Minors at the U.S./Mexico Border

The United States government creates policies that have systematically excluded nonwhites from being legally recognized as members of U.S. society. Immigration laws have historically been influenced by the cultural construction of race and racism in the United States. Discriminatory immigration policy is exemplified in 1848 with the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, a law that grants Mexicans U.S. citizenship but only “those who could prove that they were not American Indians were allowed to naturalize” (Motomura 2014, 98). Mexicans were not the only targeted ethnic group of unjust immigration laws. Chinese and Japanese were also mindfully excluded as documented citizens. The government created the Chinese exclusion laws and the Supreme Court refused to hear any challenges to those laws. “In 1922, the Court ruled that Takao Ozawa, a Japanese immigrant, was not white and therefore was ineligible to naturalize” (Motomura 2014, 98). Such exclusionary policies are still being enforced and written into law.

A more recent law that was created in Arizonan law intended to target anyone who is unlawfully present in the United States. (<http://www.ncsl.org>). The bill was named “ ‘Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act’ or SB 1070.” (Swanson and Torres 2016, 36). According to Swanson and Torres the bill was going to make life difficult for undocumented migrants, because it led to racial profiling. (2016, 36). Concerns about the validity to this law were raised, including “the costs to the state for enforcing federal immigration law, particularly in tight budget times; how ‘reasonable suspicion of immigrant status’ will be interpreted; and the narrow list of documents eligible to demonstrate lawful presence.” (<http://www.ncsl.org>).

As this history aptly attests, racial discrimination clearly impacts immigration law. Although that concept is important to understand how our immigrant laws are created, and by whom; I will be focusing on the treatment unaccompanied minor goes through at the U.S./Mexico border. It is crucial to know what is going on to with these unaccompanied minors now, because it is the hot topic of today's current events. Immigration has been a very controversial topic since forever. It is gaining more media interested because of the U.S. current president Trump. For example, a very hot topic that was over the news were the groups of migrants entering the U.S. that including children. In late 2018 early 2019 many migrant caravans started to form in order to reach the United States safely. An article written by the LA Times on January 2019 stated, "around 700 men, women and children crossed into Guatemala (from Honduras) on Tuesday after showing their documents at the Agua Caliente border crossing and set off very early on Wednesday morning for Guatemala City, according to figures from the Honduran government."



**Figure 1:** A mother and her child are part of the migrant caravan, trying to get in make it to the U.S. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/22/us/immigration-detention.html>

Shown in figure 1, there were a great amount of migrant children with parents coming into the United States, while others without. There has raised concerns to the United States government,

especially the current president Trump. As you read through this research, you find that this was not the first type of caravan that has happened. There was a wave of migrant children entering the U.S. at certain time periods. Those who are accompanied minors go through a dehumanizing immigration system. What I want to know is why hasn't there been a legislation to simplify the immigration processes for these unaccompanied minors, and if there is hope for them in the future?

According to the law titled INA 6 U.S.C. § 279(g) the term “unaccompanied alien child” refers to

“a child who— (A) has no lawful immigration status in the United States; (B) has not attained 18 years of age; and (C) with respect to whom—(i) there is no parent or legal guardian in the United States; or (ii) no parent or legal guardian in the United States is available to provide care and physical custody.” (<https://www.govinfo.gov>).

The government specifically the Justice Department “has told its attorneys that the term ‘undocumented’ is inaccurate according to U.S. immigration law and that they should start using the legally correct term.” (Morton, 2018). While “ ‘undocumented immigrant’ is a politically correct, made-up term adopted by pro-illegal alien advocacy groups and liberal media outlets to obscure the fact that such aliens have violated U.S. immigration law and are in the country illegally,” the correct term is illegal aliens. ([www.heritage.org](http://www.heritage.org)). In this paper I will not be using the term “illegal aliens” to identify this undocumented children, because in my opinion no human should be labeled as illegal on this planet, because no one is on this planet is here illegally. In addition when the word alien is mentioned the first thing people think of is a green extraterrestrial creatures, we are all humans on this planet. Instead I will be using the term unaccompanied undocumented immigrant children or UUI children.

Unaccompanied undocumented immigrant children (UUI children) from Central America and Mexico are migrating because of negative living conditions in their home countries. Some examples of these negative living conditions are because of gang violence, family abuse, and sexual abuse. In a study conducted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) during the months May-August of 2013, 404 UUI children shared their personal stories on reasons why they left their home country. The study divides the UUI children's stories into the country they left behind. The countries are Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. From those UUI children from El Salvador "69 (66%) of the children from El Salvador reported having left because of some form of violence in society at the hands of organized armed criminal actors or others in the community, or due to lack of State protection from these types of harm." (UNHCR, 31). Those from Guatemala reported "abuse in the home, at 23%; and violence in society (i.g. gang violence), at 20%." (UNCHR, 34). From Honduras "forty-three (44%) of these children experienced or were threatened with some form of violence in society. Twenty-four (24%) of the children mentioned issues of abuse in the home. Eleven (11%) of the children reported that they had been subjected to more than one of these serious harms." (UNHCR, 36). Last, Mexico had "thirty-three (32%) of the children spoke of the inescapable violence in Mexican society wrought by the drug cartels and other criminal actors, and of these 33 children, 12 had been recruited into the human smuggling industry. Seventeen (17%) children disclosed abuse in the home." (UNCHR, 37).

Despite all of these tragedies, UUI children are not welcomed in the U.S. as a result of the broken immigration system starting from the Obama Administration (2008-2016) to the current U.S. presidencies Trump (2017-present). It is important to compare how unaccompanied undocumented children were treated during the Obama versus the Trump administrations. Figure

2, below, details the number of unaccompanied undocumented children apprehended by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Enforcement (CBP) from fiscal years 2014 until February 2019. A significant increase of children from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and a bit of Mexico during the years fiscal years 2014, a bit of 2016 and 2018. The fiscal year of 2019 only has records up until April.

Unaccompanied Alien Children Apprehensions by Country						
Country	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19TD APR
El Salvador	16,404	9,389	17,512	9,143	4,949	6,109
Guatemala	17,057	13,589	18,913	14,827	22,327	19,991
Honduras	18,244	5,409	10,468	7,784	10,913	11,569
Mexico	15,634	11,012	11,926	8,877	10,136	5,988

**Figure 2:** Unaccompanied Alien Children Apprehensions by Country: Fiscal Years 2014-2019 <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/sw-border-migration/usbp-sw-border-apprehensions>

The immigration system is too complicated to fully understand how it functions by the general population, let alone migrants whose first language is not English, let alone complex legal language. An immigration lawyer’s job is to assist migrants in the immigration process by explaining the immigration system to their clients in simple terms. After unaccompanied undocumented children enter the United States, they have to start a very different journey navigating the immigration system. As the unaccompanied undocumented children enter the country, the first responders are the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Enforcement (CBP), who apprehend the children. According to the CBP website, their job is to

“keep terrorists and their weapons out of the U.S. while facilitating lawful international travel and trade...take a comprehensive approach to border management and control, combining customs, immigration, border security, and agricultural protection into one coordinated and supportive activity, while enforcing hundreds of U.S. laws and regulations” (CBP 2016).

This describing of what the CBP’s job is supposed to do is significant, because it is the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Enforcement has many other duties, but it seem like they are only focusing on the immigration part. In addition, interpreting this description and the way the CBP is doing its job, it looks as if they are labeling immigrants as terrorists, because they want to keep them out from the U.S. Trump has insisted on doing something about the border, he also linked terrorism with immigrants. In the LA times it said that a report was released on January 16, 2018 from the executive branch stating, “549 people convicted of terrorism charges since 9/11 were born outside the U.S. Administration officials called that a sign that the U.S. needs to scrap its policy of family preferences for visas, which they call “chain migration,” and a diversity visa lottery program.” (Tanfani, 2018). Figure 3 shows a how Trump feels about the Southern border made on the date when the report was given out.



**Figure 3:** A Tweet from Trump expressing his feelings about the U.S./Mexico Border. <https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-pol-updates-everything-president-trump-touts-report-that-attempts-to-link-1516254169-htmlstorv.html>

Once UUI children are apprehended by CBP officials, they are “placed in a detention center, commonly known as the ‘icebox’ or *hielera* in Spanish” (Luiselli 2017, 21). They are placed a detention center to “determine whether a child is truly ‘unaccompanied’” (Hing 2019, 65). The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) mandates UUI children should not be held in any detention center for more than 72 hours. According to the TEDS (Transport, Escort Detention, and Search) policy “detainees should generally not be held for longer than 72 hours in CBP hold rooms or holding facilities.” (www.cbp.gov).

Further, CBP should notify HHS within in 48 hours of apprehending a UUI child (State, n.d.). There are times when these UUI children are “held for several days, even weeks beyond the limit of 72 hours” (Swanson and Torres 2016, 37). Once these children are released to HHS, they are then put under a program monitored by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) called the Unaccompanied Alien Children Program (UAC Program). The UAS Program was developed under the Homeland Security Act of 2002, and its stated goal is to, “move away from the adult detention model. Each child must be promptly placed in the least restrictive setting that is in the best interest of the child.” (www.acf.hhs.gov).

UUI children are also treated as adults, and not minors, under current U.S. immigration law. UUI children are “held accountable in the same way as adults when they are enjoined to find competent pro bono legal representation” (Terrio 2015, 14). For example, UUI children have to make important decisions, independent of familial support or guidance, in regards to being “released from custody, family reunification, and return to the home country” (Terrio 2015, 14). UUI children are already forced to take care of themselves in a country without their parents, and it is not fair for these children to get questioned and make crucially important life decisions like an adult.

Legal representation is crucial for these reasons. During the Obama administration, in 2014 when the “wave” of children entered the United States. “During fiscal year 2014 (October 2013-September 2014), 68,541 unaccompanied children were apprehended at the US/Mexico border— a 77 percent increase over the previous year.” (Lind 2014). UUI children were given just 21 days to “find a lawyer to represent their case before their first court hearing” when it used to be twelve months (Luisella 2017, 39). Not giving the UUI children the proper time to find an attorney is not right. UUI children need someone who can explain to them their rights are, and

how the law works. Adding on to that, “the Department of Justice (DOJ) ordered that immigration courts expedite the cases of UUI children, calling it ‘rocket docket’, which made it more difficult for youth to secure pro-bono attorneys.” (Swanson and Torres 2016, 38).

While UUI children are treated as adults under the law, they are also exposed to a series of questions that might be difficult for them to answer. Usually an immigration lawyer or interpreter asks a series of questions to determine if a child is eligible for a “relief form.” This screening is used to assess whether or not a UUI child qualifies for asylum, for example Special Immigration Juvenile Status (SIJS). Being eligible for an immigration relief sounds hopeful, but “the intake questionnaire for undocumented children, reveals a colder, more cynical and brutal reality” (Luiselli 2017, 10). Entering the United States, some “border patrol agents or (CBP) conduct asylum screening” which “violates simple conflict of interest conditions. US Border Patrol agents lack training to do this type of work with children.” (Swanson and Torres 2016, 37). CBP agents lack adequate training needed to screen UUI children. UUI children might not know how to respond or may be afraid of answering the screening questions which would be particularly problematic if they are being screened by a BCP agent as opposed to a person that is not directly involved in the immigration system (e.g. human rights advocate or volunteer).

In the book, *Tell Me How It Ends* by Valeria Luiselli (insert publication date here), the author describes how the screening questions to determine asylum eligibility are confusing for UUI children,

“Question twenty-two – ‘Did you stay in touch with your parents’ went through various iterations:

‘When you were there, how did you contact your mother?’

Child: What?

Did you talk to your mother when she was here and you were there?

Child: Back where?

Did your mother call you on the phone?’” (Luiselli 2017, 63).

Many times adults are told to explain something as if they are going to explain to it to a child. Children in general take everything literal. Children need extra explaining and details. Asking UUI children the same series of screening questions that are asked to adults. The pressure UUI children experience is immense as they must provide the right set of answer (in the eyes of their screener) to be eligible for a form of relief.

Once the screening questionnaire is completed, “the next step is to find legal representation. Once an attorney has agreed to take on a case, the real legal battle begins” (Luiselli 2017, 8). The way the immigration attorney determines if they will take a UUI child’s case is if the child has a strong case for relief. In order to have a strong case, the child must have been through a series of traumatic events in their home country. UUI children as stated before have escaped gang violence, family abuse, and/or sexual abuse. “Many youth, particularly boys, hitch rides atop freight trains to travel thousands of kilometers through Mexico, coming from Central America,” also they have to be careful of being kidnaped. “...Cartels have also forcibly recruited migrants to do their bidding.” (Swanson and Torres 2016, 34). Then they make the journey by themselves. In 2014, Alberto had to tell his traumatic experience in order to see if he could qualify for an asylum. This is a part of his story, describing what finally made him decide to leave his home country of Guatemala:

“The last time I was the gangsters was February 6, 2014. I was getting off the bus from work when I saw a gangster in an alley. I started walking through a cornfield to avoid them, but they saw and started yelling and chasing after me. I ran and circled back through the field. As I left the field, another group of gangsters threw a muddy rock that hit me in the face as I ran by. I heard shots in the air, but I kept running because they wanted to kill me for sure... As I ran into my house, my four-year-old niece and mother hugged me. A bit later, the gangsters arrived outside throwing stones at the windows and roof...Sucha yelled, ‘you are dead if you ever leave your house again’” (Hing 2019, 62-63).

Gang violence is common in the Northern Triangles, and Mexico. They are an easy target because of their vulnerability. “Children are more likely to be emotionally affected by hostile situations. Memories of traumatic events may linger in a child’s mind and may result in ongoing, long-term psychological harm.” (UNHCR, 43). UUI children migrate to the U.S. searching for safety. It seems like it is not the case.

New legal regulations are making it more difficult for UUI children to ask for and receive asylum. On November 8, 2018,

“Acting Attorney General, Matthew Whitaker, and Department of Homeland Security Secretary, Kirstjen Nielsen, today announced an Interim Final Rule declaring that those aliens who contravene a presidential suspension or limitation on entry into the United States through the southern border with Mexico issued under section 212(f) or 215(a)(1) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) will be rendered ineligible for asylum” (Justice 2018).

Prior to Trump’s crackdown on comprehensive immigration reform, President Obama ushered in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program in 2012. DACA was created for

“certain people who came to the United States as children and meet several guidelines may request consideration of deferred action for a period of two years, subject to renewal. They are also eligible for work authorization. Deferred action is a use of prosecutorial discretion to defer removal action against an individual for a certain period of time” (USCIS, 2018).

DACA does not grant a lawful status, meaning it is not a visa nor does it signify legal permanent residency (LPR). DACA could have potentially helped many unaccompanied undocumented children who met the requirements of this program. Instead, the Obama administration took a different approach to UUI children who arrived in great numbers during the summer of 2014. As previously stated, UUI children are escaping poverty and violence from their country of origin.

The Obama administration, therefore, should have been better prepared for the influx of such arrivals to the U.S. and Mexico border. Obama's administration deported about "two million noncitizens" by the "soring of 2014." (Golsha-Boza 2015, viii). During 2014 UUI children "deportations were not a priority prior to the 2014," but after the wave of UUI children entered the country their deportations were priority. In 2016, 44 percent out of the 23,000 unaccompanied children didn't have counsel when being presented to an immigration judge, and 86 percent of those 23,000 unaccompanied children got deported. (Hing 2019, 219). Obama and Trump have not made a change to improve the UUI children's process in the immigration system. As we will see next, with the current president, things have not improved. With the help of media the citizens are informed about current events happening to these UUI children.

Media helps inform the public to what is going on in the world. This is especially important when detailing the the U.S.-Mexico border. The public must stay informed about what is happening to UUI children when they get apprehended by border patrol. In 2000 there was an unaccompanied undocumented child from Cuba whom was the first to grab the attention of the media and general public.

The New York Times published an article in September 2018 that says the number of children entering the United States are "the same numbers from the past years" (Dickerson 2018). The article cites a reason why there "seems" to be a lot more children is because strict "immigration enforcement...[has] discouraged relatives and family friends from coming forward to sponsor children" (Dickerson 2018). As the number of UUI children start to increase as the year goes by, according to the current administration it is hard to keep UUI children in shelters monitored by ORR. The Trump administration chose to "triple the size of a temporary 'tent city' in Tornillo, Texas...It can hold up to 3,800 children." (Dickerson 2018). Two months after this

article was published, President Trump Tweets about increasing border security. He Tweets, “Republicans and Democrats MUST come together, finally, with a major Border Security package, which will include funding for the Wall. After 40 years of talk, it is finally time for action. Fix the Border, for once and for all, NOW!” (November 23, 2018).

Then acting Attorney General, Jeff Session, enforced the zero-tolerance policy during the summer of 2018. The zero-tolerance policy is “8 U.S.C. § 1325(a), which prohibits both attempted illegal entry and illegal entry into the United States by an alien.” (www.justice.gov).

Jeff Session made the following remark:

“To those who wish to challenge the Trump Administration’s commitment to public safety, national security, and the rule of law, I warn you: illegally entering this country will not be rewarded, but will instead be met with the full prosecutorial powers of the Department of Justice. To the Department’s prosecutors, I urge you: promoting and enforcing the rule of law is vital to protecting a nation, its borders, and its citizens.” (www.justice.gov).

This policy was being enforced because the current administration wanted the U.S./Mexico border to be controlled. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) separated children from their parents. Figure 4, below, shows the emotional tole that such violent and traumatic separation can have on a child.



**Figure 4:** Child being taken away from their guardian and put into the immigration system all alone in McAllen, Texas.  
<https://www.parents.com/news/how-to-help-migrant-parents-children-being-separated-at-the-border/>

As these unaccompanied children are already under so much pressure. Going in front of a judge in a huge court is terrifying. However, according to a senior Justice Department official, claims otherwise Jack Weil, a longtime immigration judge stated that it is possible to teach “immigration law literally to 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds. It is possible to do and it would be a fair trial” (Markon, 2016). Having immigration judges with this mindset is not right because many UUI children do not know what is going on and by no means will it be a fair trial. UUI children going through the immigration system

“are not entitled to representation at government expense, so they must defend themselves against trained government attorneys who bring evidence against the child in court...immigration courts do not accord special treatment to children.” (Chen, 2014).

Neither the Obama nor the Trump administrations have tried to change this policy and the situation for UUI children has only worsened.

In December 2018, an 8-year-old died in the custody of CBP. The young boy from Guatemala “was taken to the hospital after a border agent noticed signs of illness, and the medical staff first diagnosed him with a common cold and later detected a fever” (McLaughlin, 2018). According to what CBP reported, after taking him to the hospital and being returned to the facility “that evening, the boy began vomiting and was taken back to the hospital for evaluation. He died hours later,” (McLaughlin, 2018). Another death of a migrant child happened around the same time. “Jakelin Caal Maquin, fled Guatemala with her father, and after surviving the 2,000-mile journey to New Mexico, she died December 8, fewer than 48 hours

after CBP detained her and her dad” (McLaughlin, 2018). Although these children were *not* unaccompanied, these tragic deaths show CBP are not the appropriate first responders to take care of children. To add insult to injury, President Trump publicly blamed Democrats of the death of the boy, instead of taking creating a bill that would prevent more children deaths.

Another death occurred on April 30, 2018, “a 16-year-old Guatemalan immigrant had died in US custody, days after arriving at an Office of Refugee Resettlement shelter.” (Alvarez and Shoichet 2019). The boy got severally ill the after he arrived to an ORR shelter showing no health issues, was taken to the hospital then released that same day; the next day he went back to a different hospital, which then “the boy underwent emergency surgery at that hospital, Guatemala's foreign ministry said. On April 30, after days of 24-hour intensive care, he died there.” (Alvarez and Shoichet 2019).

In addition to possibly facing death, UII children are also being sexually assaulted. “In total, between October 2014 and July 2018, 4,556 sexual abuse complaints were reported to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) — an agency within HHS in charge of caring for unaccompanied migrant minors” (Montoya-Galvez, 2019). Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show the numbers of allegations of sexual abuse reports have increased between those two fiscal years of 2016 and 2018. One of the documents, which details the allegations of sexual abuse by adult facility staff during fiscal years 2015 and 2016, “describes incidents in which unaccompanied minors reported they had been shown pornographic material, forcibly kissed, or inappropriately touched or fondled” (Montoya-Galvez, 2019).

Table 2: Allegations of sexual abuse reported to DOJ, by type of incident, FY 2016

	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Total
Allegations Reported to ORR*	124	108	90	97	75	85	81	85	120	107	120	134	1226
Allegations Reported to DOJ**	46	39	29	37	22	26	27	28	22	26	27	19	348
Unknown Perpetrator	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	3
UAC-on-UAC	35	32	24	28	13	20	20	27	17	21	23	16	276
Non-UAC Minor-on-UAC†	3	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	7
Allegations with an Adult Reported to DOJ	8	7	4	7	9	5	7	1	5	2	4	3	62
Staff-on-Minor	8	7	3	6	8	5	7	1	4	2	3	2	56
Non-staff Adult-on-Minor	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5

**Figure 5.1:** Allegations of sexual abuse in the fiscal year 2016.

[https://teddeutch.house.gov/uploadedfiles/naduac1213\\_sexual\\_assaults\\_by\\_date\\_of\\_incident\\_fy15-18.pdf](https://teddeutch.house.gov/uploadedfiles/naduac1213_sexual_assaults_by_date_of_incident_fy15-18.pdf)

*Table 2: Allegations of sexual abuse reported to DOJ, by type of incident, FY 2018*

	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Total
Allegations Reported to ORR*	41	70	90	117	84	109	145	161	208	236	--	--	1261
Allegations Reported to DOJ**	7	9	11	38	25	34	65	77	86	60	--	--	412
Unknown Perpetrator	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	--	--	0
UAC-on-UAC	6	5	9	34	20	29	59	63	76	48	--	--	349
Non-UAC Minor-on-UAC†	0	1	0	0	2	1	2	1	1	0	--	--	8
Allegations with an Adult Reported to DOJ	1	3	2	4	3	4	4	13	9	12	--	--	55
Staff-on-Minor	1	2	2	4	2	4	4	10	8	12	--	--	49
Non-staff Adult-on-Minor	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	3	1	0	--	--	6

**Figure 5.2:** Allegations of sexual abuse in the fiscal year 2018. The numbers of abuse increase as the number of unaccompanied children increased as well.

[https://teddeutch.house.gov/uploadedfiles/naduac1213\\_sexual\\_assaults\\_by\\_date\\_of\\_incident\\_fy15-18.pdf](https://teddeutch.house.gov/uploadedfiles/naduac1213_sexual_assaults_by_date_of_incident_fy15-18.pdf)

Despite the Flores Settlement, there are still inhumane treatments towards UUI childre.

The Flores Settlement was about:

“In the 1980s immigrants' rights organizations challenged the government's treatment of unaccompanied children. Children were detained in prison-like settings where they were placed in cells with unrelated adults of both sexes and were vulnerable to abuse by guards and other prisoners. As a result of a lawsuit, the Flores Settlement Agreement established a policy for the detention, treatment and release of unaccompanied children. Fundamental to the Agreement is the notion that a favored policy is the release of children from detention. The Flores Settlement required the government to provide basic humane detention conditions, including food and drinking water, medical assistance, toilets and sinks, adequate temperature control, proper supervision and separation from unrelated adults.” (cliniclegal.org).

There hasn't been new legislation to improve the immigration process for these unaccompanied undocumented immigrant children. There have been more plans to dehumanize them. UUI children get transferred so many times. From a detention facility to ORR to a sponsor to court. There has been a consideration to move the UUI children to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. “In April,

we also learned that the Department of Homeland Security considered sending migrant children to an old “dormitory facility” at Guantanamo.” This will make more difficult for “journalists, lawyers, and human rights groups access to monitor or investigate, enabling officials to commits abuses with little risk of being discovered.” (Shah 2019).

They want the freedom to be a child. They want to play, run around and be happy, but they are not given that opportunity in their native country. In their country of origin they live in fear, they live where there is gang violence, where there is poverty. “Their work, study, play and social activities are mediated by their fear of gangs, the police, and sometimes their family members.” (Swanson and Torres 2016, 24). Living in constant fear is not the way children should be living or anyone. The Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala) “is of the most dangerous regions in the world and in recent years the influence of complex organized groups has grown,” which means there are more murders are occurring. (AIC - Cantor and Johnson 2016, 2). The solution that UUI children come up with is to migrate to the United States.

Yet when they arrive to the U.S. they are not treated like children, they are treat like an adult. They are put into an immigration system that makes no sense to them all by themselves. They put into cells, sent to another facility, sent to see a judge, need to find an attorney on their own, and find a way to stay in the U.S. To seek asylum UUI children must tell their reasoning of leaving their home country but the reasons might be to hard for them to talk about. It can even be traumatic. Having UUI repeat their traumatic stories over and over again just so they can justify their stay in the U.S. does not seem the correct way.

Is there hope for these UUI children? As of right now our immigration system is a broken one, especially when it comes to handling UUI children. There has to be a better way to make the children feel welcomed. There has to be a better way to let the children stay in the U.S., because

one day maybe an UUI child could become the first person to find a solution to pollution, or our next senator, or our next Supreme Court Justices. I think there is hope, maybe not now. Not today but one day there will be legislators under a new presidential administration that will recreate hoe UUI children get treated. Giving them the help they need right now will be paid off when they become an adult with a career and ready to give back to the country that helped them, when they needed it the most. The U.S. can help developing countries by welcoming immigrants seeking asylum, starting with unaccompanied undocumented immigrant children.

## **Appendix 1. Abbreviations**

UUI: Unaccompanied undocumented immigrant children  
DOJ: Department of Justice  
HHS: Department of Health and Human Services  
DHS: Department of Homeland Security  
CBP: Customs and Border Enforcement  
USCIS: United States Citizenship and Immigration Services  
ICE: Immigration and Customs Enforcement  
ORR: Office of Refugee Resettlement  
UAC Program: Unaccompanied Alien Children Program  
ACF: Administration for Children and Families

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