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July 30, 2014

The Honorable John Kerry  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

I write to express my concern for the humanitarian crisis at the border and to commend the Administration for considering a pilot plan to offer in-country processing for child refugees in Honduras. We need to explore every viable option that may help slow the flow of children making the dangerous journey to the United States while balancing other complementary protection mechanisms.

Over the past eight months, a reported 57,000 unaccompanied children have crossed into the United States seeking safety from gang violence and extreme poverty in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. Those figures are a 99 percent increase from the same time last year.

The dangers faced by migrants trying to cross the border can be severe, especially for children. Children are often robbed, beaten, and are the victims of sexual and other violence. This year alone, the U.S. Border Patrol has identified more than 220 deaths along the southwest border, including 34 drowning deaths.

It is estimated that as many as 90,000 children are expected to make the dangerous journey to the U.S. by the end of this year. We need to explore every safe and commonsense option available to discourage children from risking their lives to migrate to the U.S. unlawfully. One of many solutions could be the full implementation of orderly departure methods, also referred to as in-country processing.

In-country processing has been used in the past to address migration from countries like Vietnam, Iraq, and Cuba. The program has historically discouraged migrants from making the perilous journey to the U.S. by offering them the opportunity to begin resettlement procedures from their country of nationality or habitual residence. Those who qualify would be able to apply for refugee status from their country of origin. This option should be considered as one of many long-term solutions to help protect children fleeing violence.

We can all agree that the children's safety should be our number one priority. An orderly departure process or in-country processing could provide an alternative pathway to children who might otherwise consider making the perilous journey to the U.S. I encourage you to move forward with your pilot program in Honduras and, if successful, urge you to expand your efforts to include El Salvador and Guatemala.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Linda T. Sanchez". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "L" and "S".

LINDA T. SÁNCHEZ

Member of Congress