

WRITING AN OP-ED ON THE MIGRATION CRISIS

Template: Please edit into your own words and make personal connections to your own experience and family. Some newspaper guidelines will likely want op-eds to be a little longer and letters to be a little shorter. So please feel free to use this template to fit your newspaper's guidelines.

What would you do to save a child?

(AS APPROPRIATE: In response to the article/op-ed/letter on DATE,) I believe it's critical that we understand why these children are coming. Families in Central America are experiencing record levels of violence. In Honduras alone, murders of women and girls have increased 346 percent since 2005. Our own State Department has warned not to travel to El Salvador or Honduras because "the police can't protect you".

In some cases, gangs control the police and forcibly recruit children into their ranks. Young girls are forced to be "girlfriends" of gang leaders, meaning they are repeatedly violated by all members of the gang. None of us may ever know first-hand the impossible choices these families have to make. I can't imagine choosing between my child's life being in imminent danger and the risk of sending her on a dangerous journey to safety. As Americans, we must have empathy and we must respond with compassion.

The very fact that parents send their children to another country for safety, despite knowing the dangers of the journey, demonstrates that the alternative - remaining in their country - is just not an option. It is also critical to note that children and families are fleeing not just to the United States. Nearby countries like Nicaragua and Belize have seen a 712 percent increase in people seeking asylum from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador.

The U.S. has a moral and legal obligation to ensure we do not return these children back to harm. This means we have to care for them and provide opportunities for them to apply for asylum. And the U.S. must demand that their governments better protect these children and work with them to stop police and military corruption, safeguard women's shelters and witness protection programs, and release the holds that gangs have on communities by providing education and work opportunities for young people.

As Americans and [STATE connection Virginians/Californians/Nebraskans/etc] in particular, we are people with great compassion, hospitality and generosity. When a child shows up on our doorstep seeking refuge from danger, whether one child or thousands, we must protect them in a way that reflects our highest values. Rather than judging situations that we cannot fathom, we must respond to the needs of these children in the way we would want someone to treat to our children if, God forbid, the situation were reversed.