Ohalah Statement on the Separation of Children from Parents at the U.S. Border

“Do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the foreigner or the poor.” (Zechariah 7:10)

We, the rabbis, cantors and rabbinic pastors of OHALAH join with our colleagues in HIAS, the RAC, Bend the Arc, Network of Spiritual Progressives, International Rabbinic Fellowship, Shalom Center, T’ruah and dozens of other Jewish organizations in condemning the current and unconscionable practice of separating children from their parents when families are seeking asylum at the U.S. border. The inhumane separation of families is being justified by U.S. Attorney General Jefferson B. Sessions and implemented by the Department of Homeland Security by spuriously pressing criminal charges against every person arriving regardless of the merits of their asylum case, and denying the validity of asylum claims for those fleeing domestic or gang violence in their home countries.

BUT IT IS NOT ILLEGAL BY INTERNATIONAL LAW TO SEEK ASYLUM. We are outraged, and we stand with the U.N in condemning these human rights atrocities.

“God heeds the pleas of the oppressed.” (Ps. 10:17) So must we.

The conditions in the detention centers where children are being held are deplorable, with reports of freezing temperatures, lack of clean drinking water, bedding in poor condition, and even cage-like structures. We call on OHALAH members and all people of conscience to speak out to those in Congress, and to join and donate to those fighting the abusive mistreatment of already vulnerable children and families.

These immoral practices are causing trauma for both the children and their parents, as noted by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Physicians and the American Psychiatric Association. As Jews, the descriptions of babies torn from their mothers’ breasts evoke memories of the Holocaust. And the maltreatment of those seeking refuge at our borders goes against every Jewish and moral principle regarding the treatment of strangers. We must raise our voices against it. As our teacher Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel taught, “There is a cry for justice that only humans must answer. There is a need for acts of compassion that only humans must satisfy.” We are answering this call.

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We seek *tzedek* (justice) and *tikkun* (restorative healing) through potent action, speaking our outrage, examining our consciences and prayer. We pray for our sisters and brothers fleeing violence and poverty. We pray for the souls of the Border Patrol, whose morality is being compromised by the immorality of their orders. We pray for the humanity of our elected officials that they end these cruel practices. We pray for our own humanity, and for the strength to be steadfast witnesses for justice and compassion.

*OHALAH is a trans-denominational association of Rabbis, Cantors, and students in these fields. The Rabbinic Pastors Association (RPA) is a branch of OHALAH whose members are rabbinic pastors, chaplains, and students in these fields. OHALAH represents more than two hundred Jewish clergy engaged in the transformation and renewal of Judaism.*

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