



Statement on Forced Separation of Children and Parents at U.S.-Mexico Border
Department of Counseling Psychology
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Members of UW-Madison's Department of Counseling Psychology call for immediate cessation of unjust forced child-parent separations at the U.S.-Mexico border, reunification of children separated from parents, and humane treatment of all persons within our borders regardless of citizenship or documentation status. As scientist-practitioners in mental health fields, we are painfully aware of the profound trauma to children and their parents of forced child-parent separations and the long-term effects of childhood trauma on psychological, neurological, physical, and social functioning (e.g., Allen, Cisneros, & Tellez, 2015; Pakulak, Stevens, & Neville, 2018; Rojas-Flores, Clements, Hwang Koo, & London, 2017; Zayas, Aguilar-Gaxiola, Yoon, & Rey, 2015). The recent events are painful reminders of the long history in the U.S. of violence directed toward ethnic and racial minority populations, including forced child-parent separations during slavery and through the Indian Boarding School system as well as internment camps during WWII. We are using this opportunity to recommit ourselves to living through Ubuntu and ask the U.S. government to do the same: Desmond Tutu described Ubuntu in this way:

[Ubuntu] speaks of the very essence of being human. When we want to give high praise to someone we say, Yu, u nobuntu; hey, so-and-so has Ubuntu. Then you are generous, you are hospitable, and you are friendly and caring and compassionate. You share what you have. It is to say, my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours. We belong in a bundle of life. We say a person is a person through other persons. It is not I think therefore I am. It says rather: I am human because I belong, I participate, and I share. A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for [they have] a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that [they] belong in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are (tutufoundationsusa.org).

References

- Allen, B., Cisneros, E. M., & Tellez, A. (2015). The Children Left Behind: The Impact of Parental Deportation on Mental Health. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 24(2), 386–392.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-013-9848-5>

- Pakulak, E., Stevens, C., & Neville, H. (2018). Neuro-, cardio-, and immunoplasticity: Effects of early adversity. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 69, 131–156.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010416-044115>
- Rojas-Flores, L., Clements, M. L., Hwang Koo, J., & London, J. (2017). Trauma and psychological distress in Latino citizen children following parental detention and deportation. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 9(3), 352–361. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000177>
- Tutu, D. *Desmond Tutu Foundation USA*, Desmond Auto Peace Foundation, 20 June 2018,
www.tutufoundationusa.org/desmond-tutu-peace-foundation/.
- Zayas, L. H., Aguilar-Gaxiola, S., Yoon, H., & Rey, G. N. (2015). The Distress of Citizen-Children with Detained and Deported Parents. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 24(11), 3213–3223.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-015-0124-8>

June 20, 2018