

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
CONTACT: Mindy Mizell
mmizell@ijm.org
202-355-3690



**INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION URGES CONGRESS AND OBAMA
ADMINISTRATION TO DEDICATE EMERGENCY RESOURCES TO COMBAT CHILD
SEXUAL ASSAULT IN GUATEMALA**

WASHINGTON, D.C. (July 31, 2014) – While Congress continues to deliberate on a proposed emergency supplemental funding bill to respond to the surge of unaccompanied minors arriving at the U.S. border, global human rights organization International Justice Mission (IJM) urged Congress and the Obama administration to dedicate resources to deal with a critical “push” factor for Central American children fleeing their homes: sexual assault.

While both Republican and Democratic proposals dedicate the bulk of the emergency funding toward enhancing judicial and law enforcement capacity on the U.S. side of the border, substantial resources should be designated to address contributing causes of migration in the region, including domestic and sexual abuse. A recent report from the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees stated that 21 percent of the Central American child refugees they interviewed said they had survived abuse and violence in their homes. From Guatemala specifically, 23 % of children interviewed cited violence in their home as a reason for leaving.

“As devastating as gang violence is in Latin America, it isn’t the only reason these kids are turning up at the U.S. border,” said Holly Burkhalter, Vice President of Government Relations at IJM. “A significant percentage of children are fleeing sexual abuse, often in the home, and this has been a hugely overlooked factor of the child migration crisis. A long-term solution to the child migration crisis must include addressing this horrific form of everyday violence.”

IJM has operated an office in Guatemala since 2005, which provides legal representation and social support for child victims of sexual assault. During that time, IJM has provided support to more than 330 child victims of sexual assault and their families, and, in partnership with government authorities, secured the convictions of 173 individuals for rape and other acts of sexual violence against children. Because sexual assault is a contributing factor to the Guatemalan children seeking refuge in the U.S., IJM has urged leaders in Congress and the Executive Branch to scale up three very promising initiatives: 1) \$10 million to train and resource specialized police sexual assault units throughout Guatemala, 2) expansion of an existing one-stop-shop comprehensive response model (*Modelos de Atencion Integral*), where victims can report the crime, provide testimony, and receive medical care, and 3) additional capacity for sexual assault courts, so they can keep pace with the demand.

“Traditionally, the Guatemalan public justice system has failed to protect the poor” said Pablo Villeda, IJM’s Vice President of Regional Operations for Latin America. “Our research shows that fewer than 6% of sexual assault cases ever reached a verdict in recent years in Guatemala. But today, the Guatemalan government is working hard to address this crisis, and the U.S. government has an opportunity to come alongside them in a meaningful way by investing in local law enforcement, emergency response for victims, and specialized courts.”

IJM urged Senate leaders to hold firm on protecting the integrity of the 2008 Trafficking Victims Protection Act, which included a provision that provided for additional legal protections for unaccompanied minors from non-border countries. This measure, which has been a point of contention in the immigration debate, helps to shield potential victims of child trafficking from being returned to their abusers.

About International Justice Mission

International Justice Mission is a global organization that protects the poor from violence throughout the developing world. IJM partners with local authorities to rescue victims of violence, bring criminals to justice, restore survivors, and strengthen justice systems. The largest non-profit organization of its kind, IJM combats slavery, sex trafficking, rape, police brutality, property grabbing and other forms of violence in nearly 20 communities throughout Africa, Latin America, South Asia and Southeast Asia. www.IJM.org

###