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# Values tested by border crisis

GUSTAVO GARCÍA-SILLER, FOR THE EXPRESS-NEWS : AUGUST 15, 2014 : Updated: August 15, 2014 5:06pm

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Photo By Johan Ordonez / AFP/ Getty Images

Children arrive in Guatemala last month after they were deported from the United States. But simply deporting these children would be disastrous for them and counter to our values.



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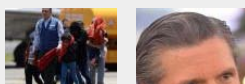
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SAN ANTONIO — We have an international humanitarian crisis in our country, and this impacts the state of Texas, especially the border region, in powerful ways. Recently, I read an op-ed in this newspaper intimating that, because the continued surge of undocumented immigrants on our Southwest border from Mexico and Central America affects communities across our nation, in a sense every American lives on the border today. For reasons, different from the writer's intention, I agree. As a nation, we all are affected by the plight of these children.

While my personal interest embraces the welfare of all undocumented immigrants in our country, I have a special human and pastoral concern about the women and children who are recent arrivals, especially unaccompanied children immigrants. Most have fled their homelands because they suffered or faced serious harms, including death, from violence by local gangs and international drug cartels and from domestic abuse.

As a bishop in Texas, I am fully aware of the severe challenges that we face along the border, but I have also been edified by the wonderful efforts of generous, compassionate people of good will and faith-based service agencies from across the country, and especially from our own state, to welcome and care for women and children in desperate situations.

I additionally wish to express my gratitude to all of the Catholic parishes whose members donated much-needed Spanish-language Bibles, clothing, toiletries and cash, which were distributed by [Catholic Charities](#) of San Antonio where they were needed most, especially along the border at points of entry.

In early July, [Antonio Fernandez](#), the president and CEO of Catholic Charities, and I went to Lackland AFB to celebrate Masses for the nearly 1,400 unaccompanied immigrant children in residence there. The authorities gave us a tour of the facilities where the children were housed. It was a clean, safe environment; security and discipline were strict.

With the closing of the temporary shelter at Lackland, we must not believe that this humanitarian crisis has been resolved. This is just a new and equally challenging chapter in the lives of these vulnerable children. We must continue to call upon the U.S. government to guarantee the human rights of these vulnerable children by truly ensuring due process, justice and humane treatment. Merely sending them back to the violent context from which they have fled is a shameful action.

How are we going to feel when we hear reports of these children being abused or killed in their homeland as a punishment for their attempt to escape the violence? When we talk glibly about simply deporting them as quickly as possible, are we considering the real consequences? Americans do have a conscience. Just imagine the heartbreak that will come when these most vulnerable children pay a terrible price for our actions ... or inaction!

There is no quick fix to this complex issue. Because of the partisan gridlock in the [U.S. Congress](#) and in the relationship between the [U.S. House](#) and the Obama administration, any repair of our broken immigration system seems distant. This crisis will not simply disappear. Until the complex issues are resolved in a comprehensive manner, this crisis will only deepen and worsen — further polarizing our nation.

Pope Francis has often called for a change of attitude toward migrants and refugees on the part of everyone. He has challenged us to move away from attitudes of defensiveness, fear,

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indifference and marginalization, and toward attitudes of compassion, fairness, justice and inclusion.

The children immigrant crisis is not only a U.S. problem, it is an international humanitarian crisis. In mid-July the Catholic bishops' conferences of El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico and the United States issued a statement committing us bishops "to continue working to keep migrants safe and to seek solutions to prevent people from leaving their places of origin." Please join us in shaping a more just and peaceful world.

These newly arrived immigrants — and, indeed, all undocumented immigrants — are people like ourselves, not mere problems, statistics or irritants — as I pointed out in a recent public statement. They are our sisters and brothers, children of God. Our fundamental values as a nation are at stake in our response to this crisis, and we will be judged — not only by the worldwide community but also by God — by how we care for the most vulnerable among us. Jesus said: "Whatever you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me!" (Matthew 25:39).

My friends, we can do much better than we have done so far by resolving this crisis in a humane, just, compassionate way.

Gustavo García-Siller is archbishop of the Archdiocese of San Antonio.

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