

TAKE ACTION:
**PROTECT
ASYLUM FOR
SURVIVORS OF
DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE**

TOOLKIT



FUTURES
WITHOUT VIOLENCE

CENTER FOR
Gender & Refugee
STUDIES

August 2018

THE ISSUE

INTRODUCTION

On June 11, 2018, Attorney General Jeff Sessions issued a decision in a case brought by a Salvadoran victim of domestic violence seeking asylum in the United States. The decision attempts to erode protections for immigrant survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault seeking asylum in the U.S.

It is now more important than ever to make your voice heard. You can use this toolkit to take action and defend these critical protections for immigrant survivors.

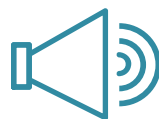
THE CASE: *MATTER OF A-B-*

In recent decades, the United States has made progress in recognizing and addressing the challenges facing immigrant survivors fleeing severe domestic violence in countries where the government does not or will not provide them protection.

In 2014, the Board of Immigration Appeals, the highest court in the immigration judicial system, issued a groundbreaking decision in *Matter of A-R-C-G-*, ruling that women fleeing domestic violence may qualify for asylum.



In a subsequent case, Ms. A.B., a woman from El Salvador, sought asylum in the United States after her husband—who had subjected her to over 15 years of brutal physical, sexual, and emotional abuse — threatened to kill her.



Listen to Ms. A.B. describe her experience fleeing severe domestic violence in a radio interview [here](#).

THE ISSUE

After Ms. A.B.'s asylum case was initially denied, the Board of Immigration Appeals ruled in her favor, finding Ms. A.B. eligible for asylum based on the precedent set in *Matter of A-R-C-G-*.

In March 2018, Attorney General Sessions employed a rarely-used power to assign the case to himself for reconsideration.

On June 11, 2018, the Attorney General issued a decision in *Matter of A-B-* that reversed the grant of protection to her, and overturned the precedent set in *Matter of A-R-C-G-*.

Make no mistake, the Attorney General's decision attempts to all but close the door on survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault seeking asylum in the United States. Although each asylum case is to be decided on its own facts, and this decision should not foreclose claims, we are seeing that claims from women who have fled horrific, life-threatening violence are being denied.

What is asylum?

Asylum is a form of protection available to individuals who, because of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, have suffered persecution or fear they will be persecuted if they return to their home country. For more information on asylum, review the Center for Gender & Refugee Studies' [information sheet](#) on asylum and *Matter of A-B-*.

For more information about the legal impact of the Attorney General's decision, consult the "[Backgrounder and Briefing](#)" materials prepared by the Center for Gender & Refugee Studies at the University of California Hastings College of the Law.

TAKE ACTION!

This is an “all hands on deck” moment. We’re asking everyone who believes that survivors of domestic violence and gender-based violence should have a fair chance to seek refuge to save themselves and their children to speak up. The stakes could not be higher.

SPEAK OUT WHEN YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS IS HOME

Gather your friends and colleagues and drop in on your local Representative or Senator at events, speaking engagements, and town halls, or in their local office.

Share why it is important to you that the Attorney General rescind his decision in *Matter of A-B-*. Urge your Member of Congress to protect asylum for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. Demand that Congress ensure survivors of domestic violence have a path and fair chance to seek asylum in the United States.

Use our talking points and tools to make your voice heard, and mobilize your friends and colleagues!

TALKING POINTS

- The Attorney General’s decision in *Matter of A-B-* attempts to reverse decades of established case law recognizing asylum protections for victims of domestic violence.
- Many of the women separated from their children at the border are fleeing violence, including severe domestic violence and other gender-based crimes. They deserve a fair chance to seek refuge in the United States.
- The *A-B-* decision threatens to undo many decades of hard-won progress we have made to bring domestic violence out of the shadows, and provide support to survivors who need help.
- Congress must do everything in its power to protect asylum for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

TAKE ACTION!

Write an email to your elected official.



[Click here](#) to automatically send an email to your elected officials or send your own email using the template below.

Dear Senator/Representative [INSERT NAME],

I am writing to ask you to demand that the Attorney General rescind his June 11th decision in *Matter of A-B-* and safeguard protections for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault seeking protection in the United States.

Many survivors seeking asylum have no choice but to seek protection in the United States; they are in situations where their governments fail to offer any meaningful protection, and the alternative for them is to remain at home where their lives and the lives of their children are at great risk. These countries cannot or do not protect these women and children. They need our help.

Please urge the Attorney General to rescind his decision in *Matter of A-B-*, and protect asylum for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault!

Sincerely,

[Your Name], [Your Address], [City, State, ZIP]

Call your Member of Congress.

You can use this script when you call:

My name is _____ and I live in _____ (City, State). I am deeply concerned about the Attorney General's decision in *Matter of A-B-*. Survivors of domestic violence fleeing horrific abuse in their home countries must be given a fair opportunity to seek asylum in the United States. I am calling on Representative/Senator _____ to stand with immigrant survivors and their children and demand Attorney General Sessions rescind his decision in *Matter of A-B-*.

POST ABOUT *MATTER OF A-B-* ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Sample Facebook Post:

"Attorney General Jeff Sessions issued an alarming decision that attempts to erode hard-won protections for survivors fleeing violence at the hands of abusive partners and family members from countries that turn a blind eye to this violence. We must uphold our asylum laws and ensure survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault have a fair chance to seek refuge in the U.S. #ImmigrantWomenToo"

Sample Tweets:

“ Seeking asylum is not a crime. We must ensure survivors of domestic violence can seek protection in the United States. #ImmigrantWomenToo ”

“ Domestic violence is a global crisis. Attorney General Jeff Sessions' decision in *Matter of A-B-* attempts to end protections for refugee survivors of gender-based violence and puts immigrant survivors' lives on the line. #ImmigrantWomenToo ”

Download and post an infographic:



RAISE AWARENESS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Write an op-ed in your local newspaper.

In my experience as a **[INSERT YOUR POSITION OR EXPERTISE]**, I have seen the impact that domestic violence has on individuals and communities. **[EXPLAIN WHY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROTECTIONS FOR IMMIGRANT SURVIVORS ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU]**.

On June 11, 2018, Attorney General Jeff Sessions issued a decision in the case of Ms. A.B., reversing a grant of asylum to., a woman from El Salvador who fled her home country and applied for asylum in the U.S. after her husband beat her and threatened to kill her. The decision attempts to erode hard-won asylum protections which have been available to immigrant survivors of domestic violence for years.

The decision is an affront to the decades of progress we have made in the United States to bring domestic violence out of the shadows and provide critical services to survivors, regardless of their country of origin. This decision cannot stand.

We have all been outraged by the pictures and stories of children being ripped out of their mothers' arms as a consequence of the "zero tolerance" immigration policy. We've heard their cries. No mother makes the treacherous journey thousands of miles unless she has no other choice but to flee to save her life, and the lives of her children.

[IF YOU ARE A PARENT] I am a mother. I would do anything, risk anything to ensure my children live free from violence and abuse. The United States has always been a beacon of hope for those fleeing violence and persecution, Congress must uphold our asylum laws and ensure survivors of domestic violence seeking refuge have a fair chance to seek asylum. We must live up to our ideals.

RAISE AWARENESS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Send an email to your friends.

Dear **[NAME]**,

I need your help. You've no doubt seen the horrific images and heard the cries of children being separated at the border from their parents. Most of these parents are women who have made the treacherous journey from Central America because they are trying to save their own lives and those of their children. The Attorney General is now attempting to ensure these survivors will not have a fair chance of receiving asylum, which is their right to pursue under current federal and international law.

Please help fight back. Make a statement on social media and tell your friends to do the same. Tell Congress to uphold our asylum laws and ensure survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault fleeing violence have a fair chance to seek refuge. The U.S. has always been a beacon of hope for the persecuted. Let's make sure we live up to our ideals. It's a matter of life or death.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]

STAY INVOLVED

Visit the new website [Immigrant Women Too](https://www.immigrantwomentoo.org) for updates on the campaign to reverse *Matter of A-B-* at www.immigrantwomentoo.org.



Learn more about the [stories of survivors](#) who describe the horrific violence that left them with no choice but to flee their homes and seek asylum in the United States.

GET INFORMED

Learn more about the state of women and level of violence in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

Regional Conflict & Violence: The [civil wars of the 1980s](#) have left behind a legacy of violence and weak governments ill-equipped to respond and prevent the violence. The decades of [violence](#), increased access to weapons, unemployment, and corruption have culminated into the perfect storm of instability and lawlessness.

Domestic Violence: Domestic violence at the hands of an intimate partner or family member is a significant factor in the decision to migrate for many women and children fleeing Central America.

[El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras rank first, third, and seventh, respectively, for rates of female homicides globally.](#) Violence against women and children in the region is inextricably linked to criminality, state insecurity, and the subordinate status of women in society.

Criminal Groups & Gangs: According to data from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Honduras ranks first, El Salvador fifth, and Guatemala sixth for rates of homicide globally. 64 percent of refugee women from Central America and Mexico surveyed for the [UNHCR's Women on the Run study](#) reported direct threats and attacks by armed criminal groups as the primary reason for leaving their countries. 58 percent of women interviewed gave accounts of experiencing sexual assault and sexual abuse.

Impunity for Perpetrators: Even with legislation in place, the judicial and law enforcement systems in these countries are ill-equipped to bring perpetrators to justice or protect victims. Guatemala's Public Prosecutor's Office received over 50,000 cases of violence against women in 2013, of which only 983—about 2 percent—culminated with a prison sentence for the perpetrator.

No Place to Run: The [UNHCR's Women on the Run study](#) found that 80 percent of refugee women from Honduras had tried to relocate internally before ultimately deciding that, despite the difficulty of the process, crossing borders was their only option to secure a better future for themselves and their children.

For more information, read the U.S. Civil Society Working Group on Women, Peace and Security policy brief, ["Violence and Insecurity in the Northern Triangle of Central America: Dangerous Choices for Women and Girls."](#)