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***A Statement from the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States
Jesuits Call for an End to Immigration Raids Targeting Central Americans***

(Washington, D.C., January 5, 2016) — The Jesuit Conference denounces the Obama Administration’s decision to conduct nationwide raids on people who have fled Central America seeking protection over the last year. On the eve of the Christmas holiday, media outlets reported the Administration’s plan to round up and deport Central American families and adult asylum seekers, despite the fact that the Northern Triangle of Central America is undergoing a human rights crisis that has resulted in the forced migration of hundreds of thousands of Guatemalan, Honduran and Salvadoran citizens.

The President is risking his legacy in conducting these immigration raids – the style and scope of which we have not seen in the last decade. We are especially disturbed by reports of immigration officials forcibly entering residences in Georgia and Texas over the last several days to conduct invasive searches and roundups of Central American asylum seekers, including children as young as four. Such tactics sow fear in immigrant communities, create distrust between these communities and law enforcement officials, and traumatize children and adult asylum seekers who survived persecution and perilous journeys to find protection in the United States.

A January 4, 2016 statement by Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson offered a particularly disturbing insight into the motivations behind these raids. The Secretary described the roundups as part of a strategy meant to deter further migration from the Northern Triangle of Central America – a region composed of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador – which is currently undergoing political upheaval and human rights violations at levels not seen since the civil wars of the 1980s. Additional components of the DHS strategy include an appeal of the federal court ruling ordering the release of children, including toddlers and infants from detention centers, and continuing support of Mexico’s immigration crackdown. We note that the Administration’s cooperation with Mexico, particularly in light of the lack of adequate screenings for people with protection concerns, and Mexico’s summary detention and deportation of Central American asylum seekers, is inconsistent with the U.S. commitment to ensuring people fleeing persecution and torture are not returned to the arms of their persecutors and torturers.

“The work of our brother Jesuits and of Jesuit institutions in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala has allowed us to witness firsthand the tragic unraveling of respect for fundamental human rights and the rule of law in the region. As the Jesuit Conference has documented, certain Northern Triangle citizens are particularly targeted by violent armed groups that wield enormous power in these three countries. Often,

children and adults who live in areas controlled by street gangs find themselves caught between gang members and militarized, often brutal, police. Rural indigenous and Afro-descendant populations are also being forced from their lands, and corruption among elites has resulted in rampant levels of inequality and poverty. These are the factors that drive people to flee for their lives. These problems cannot be addressed through irresponsible and insensitive immigration tactics. Rather the root causes of the forced displacement must be addressed,” said Fr. William Kelley, SJ, Secretary for Social and International Ministry at the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States.

About the Society of Jesus in Canada and the United States

Founded in 1540 by Saint Ignatius Loyola, the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) is the largest order of priests and brothers in the Roman Catholic Church. Jesuit priests and brothers are involved in educational, pastoral and spiritual ministries around the world, practicing a faith that promotes justice. In Canada and the United States, there are 30 Jesuit colleges and 80 pre-secondary and secondary schools with a shared goal of developing competent, compassionate and committed leaders in the service of the Church and society. Jesuits minister in parishes and at retreat houses and serve as chaplains at prisons, hospitals, nursing homes and in the military. In Canada and the U.S., the Jesuits are represented by the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States, headquartered in Washington, D.C. For more information on the Society of Jesus, visit www.jesuits.org.