

On separation of migrant families, better sense prevails

President Donald Trump has rolled back his policy of separating babies and children from their parents as part of a crackdown on illegal migrants following widespread outrage and condemnation, but there is no word yet on how thousands of children being held in detention centres will be reunited with their families. Trump had vigorously defended his “zero tolerance” policy on illegal migrants, saying it was his response to obsolete laws, and needed to secure the southern borders of the US from an “immigration crisis” that is enabling criminals, such as members of the MS-13 international gang, to enter his country. But over the past few days, people across the world reacted with shock and revulsion to reports and images of children as young as eight months being separated from parents and held in structures that can best be described as cages at detention facilities run by the US Border Patrol. There were reports of children being held 20 to a cage with aluminium foil sheets as blankets. According to the independent news website, ProPublica, which made public a heartrending audio recording of crying children between four and 10 years old at a detention facility, more than 2,300 children have been separated from their parents since the Trump administration launched its zero tolerance policy in April. Leading lights of the Trump administration even turned to the Bible to justify their actions.

However, a former head of the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement has said he believes hundreds of these separated children will never be reunited with their parents. Experts have said such separation from parents can cause permanent emotional damage. The treatment of the children, made public largely through the efforts of Democratic lawmakers and rights activists, even angered staunch Republican supporters of the Trump administration. Former first lady, Laura Bush, described the separations as cruel, and compared the detention facilities to camps in which Japanese Americans were interned during World War II. Clearly, the backlash made an impact on the Trump administration, but officials have shown little remorse.

As the elected leader of the US, Trump has every right to demand the building of a wall on his side of the border with Mexico and to take steps he believes will secure the citizens of his country. But to continue pretending that snatching children from the arms of their parents is the right thing to do will not wash. Such innocents cannot, and must not, become victims of a policy that is solely of the US President's doing.

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