Call for a U.S. Presidential Initiative to “End Sexual Violence Against Children”

Dear President Biden and Vice President Harris:

Sexual violence against children and adolescents living in the United States is rampant, constitutes a public health pandemic, and causes grave physical and psychological trauma and social havoc.¹² To address this crisis, we request that you recognize April 8, 2021 in the United States as an annual “World Day for Child Sexual Abuse Prevention, Healing and Justice,” and that you launch a bold Presidential Initiative to “End Sexual Violence Against Children” during the first 200 days of your Administration, inclusive of prevention, healing and justice. The Initiative should include the following actions:

● **Mobilize Congress to Approve Comprehensive National Legislation, the “End Sexual Violence Against Children Act,” Informed by a U.S. Presidential Commission:** As President, we call on you to effectively address the pandemic of sexual violence against children in the United States by mobilizing Congress to pass comprehensive national legislation, increase federal funding for programs and research, and expand federal incentives to improve state laws to launch large scale prevention, healing, and justice programs to prevent violence, protect survivors, and reduce the cost of sexual violence against children to society.

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¹ Sexual violence consists of a range of sexual acts against a child, including but not limited to child sexual abuse, incest, rape, sexual violence in the context of dating/intimate relationships, sexual exploitation, online sexual abuse and exploitation, and non-contact sexual abuse.
² Children is defined as 0-18 years of age.
As President, we call on you to institute a Presidential Commission to End Sexual Violence Against Children (The Commission). The Commission would be comprised of experts including researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and, importantly, adult survivors and would act as a catalyst to collect and synthesize data and research so that policymakers and the public would garner a comprehensive understanding of the crisis, the costs to society and the potential to scale-up available solutions to prevent, heal, and ensure justice.

● Declare Sexual Violence Against Children a US Public Health Emergency: As President, we call on you to use your executive authority to officially declare sexual violence against children and adolescents a public health emergency and mandate an annual U.S. Surgeon General’s report.

● Expand US Support for Global Programs to End Sexual Violence Against Children: As President, we call on you to expand US leadership to galvanize global action to end sexual violence against children and adolescents by integrating this issue in our foreign policy and by increasing international funding to support prevention, healing and justice programs.

Should questions arise, if you need additional information, or if you or your staff would like to meet with members of this movement to discuss these issues, please contact Denise Edwards at National Children’s Alliance: dedwards@nca-online.org, Jill Ruck at Child USA: jruck@childusa.org or Paul Zeitz at Together for Girls: drpaulzeit@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Teresa Huizar
Executive Director
National Children’s Alliance

Katelyn Brewer
President and CEO
Darkness to Light

Grace French
Survivor, Founder and President
The Army of Survivors

Julie Ann Rivers-Cochran, MSW
Executive Director
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Zach Hiner
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Marci Hamilton
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Dr. Daniela Ligiero
Survivor and CEO
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Dr. Melissa Merrick
President and CEO
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Katie Hanna
Coalition President
National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

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President, RAINN

Jennifer Wortham, DrPH
Founder and Chair of the April 8th Collaborative

Dr. Paul Zeitz
#IncestMeToo Survivor and Executive Director, Build A Movement 2022
Dr. Paige Alisen
Survivor and Author, “Finding Courage to Speak”

Laura Askowitz
CEO, KidSafe Foundation

Gary Barker
President and CEO, Promundo-US

Dr. Christina Bethell
Director, Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative; Professor, Bloomberg School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University

Sarah Blakemore
Chief Executive, Keeping Children Safe

Jenny Coleman
Director, Stop It Now!

Brisa De Angulo, Esq.
Survivor, Founder and CEO, A Breeze of Hope Foundation

Nina DeJonghe
Policy Director, ECPAT-USA

Dr. Mary Ellsberg
Survivor and Director, Global Women’s Institute, George Washington University

Dr. Howard R. Fradkin
Independent Trauma Psychologist

Dr. Jennifer J. Freyd
Founder and President, Center for Institutional Courage

Dr. Lyndon Haviland
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Margaret Hoelzer
US Olympian, National Spokesperson, National Children’s Advocacy Center

Dr. Myra Jones-Taylor
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Dr. Keith L. Kaufman
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Stacie LeBlanc
President, The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC)

Bruce Lesley
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Dr. Elizabeth Letourneau
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Timothy Lennon
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Tabitha Mpamira
Survivor, Founder and Director, EDJA Program

Jeannette Pai-Espinosa
President, National Crittenton

Amy Paulson
Survivor, Founder and CEO, Gratitude Alliance

Lorie Poland
Survivor, Executive Director, Foundation to End Child Abuse and Neglect (EndCAN)

Dr. Anita Raj
Director, Center on Gender Equity and Health, University of California San Diego School of Medicine

Dr. Anthony P. Rizuzuto
President and Founder, Abuse Prevention Solutions, LLC

Janet Rosenzweig
Executive Director, The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children

Esta Soler
President and Founder, Futures Without Violence
Jetta Bernier  
Executive Director, MassKids

Kristen Bierma  
Executive Director, Beacon Hill

Astrid Gamez  
Executive Director, Family Services Network

Christy Keating, J.D.  
Owner and CEO, Savvy Parents Safe Kids

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Executive Director, Children’s Trust Fund Alliance

Joy Rauls  
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Sheila Ryan  
CEO, Georgia Center for Child Advocacy

Ashley Thomas  
Founder and CEO, Bridge II Sports

Dr. Joanne Thomas  
Executive Director, Delta Crisis Center, Inc.

Kevin A. Trapani  
Co-founder and CEO, The Redwoods Group

Kathy Van Ness  
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Ali Watt  
Executive Director, Breaking Silence

Megan Banet  
Grants and Outreach Coordinator, Indiana Center for Prevention of Youth Abuse and Suicide

Sarah Drake Gilmer  
Forensic Interviewer, Children’s Advocacy Center of Eastern Arkansas

LaDonna Hall  
Clinical Services Director, Southwest Virginia Children’s Advocacy Center

Donna Hopkins Britt  
Education Facilitator, Children’s Trust

Tracy McQueen  
Trauma Advocacy Coordinator, ASSIST Indiana

Tiffany Kelly  
Clinical Program Director, Lutheran Community Services Northwest

Rachel Anderton  
Prescott House Child Advocacy Center

Gia Brooks  
Chemehuevi Indian Tribe Health Board

Amy Cozart  
District Social Service Counselor, Mooresville Graded School District

Kristen Crim  
Memphis Child Advocacy Center

Tammi Collins  
Columbus County District Attorney’s Office

Sharon Eberhard  
Life Stories Child & Family Advocacy

Michaela Gaither  
A Child’s Voice Child Advocacy Center, Inc.

Margaret S. Girdler  
Tech Coordinator, CCR&R
Priti Griffin  
Raise Me Up Foundation

Debbie Jenae  
Founder, Inspired 101

Hannah Palm  
Oxbow Farm and Conservation Center

Diana Rojas  
Hohenberger  
Realtor, Palmer House Properties Atlanta

Jennifer Samartano  
Prevent Child Abuse Illinois

Nicole Schrock  
The Child Advocacy Center

Marquita Smiley  
Alabama Dept of Human Resources

Vanessa Southworth  
Family & Children's Center

Mollyanne Vasquez  
Center for Child Protection

Samuel West  
Our Children Matter Mid-TN

Pamela Wallace  
Program Coordinator, Project Child

Jessica Wauchek  
Bilingual D2L Facilitator, Child Advocacy Center of Rutherford County, Inc.
March 22, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden Jr.
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

The April 8 Collaborative is a coalition of survivor networks and child welfare advocacy organizations working to establish an annual world day of observance to help raise awareness and promote global child sexual abuse prevention, healing, and justice initiatives.

April has been designated as Child Abuse Prevention Month in the United States since 1983. In 2009, President Barak Obama officially proclaimed April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month. This year, we ask that you acknowledge the April 8 World Day for Child Sexual Abuse Prevention, Healing, and Justice as part of these traditions.

As you know from your leadership in ending violence against children, sexual abuse is among the most significant violations of dignity a person can experience. This is a tragic crime that often destroys the opportunity for those so ruthlessly violated to achieve their full potential.

While many countries, including the United States, are working diligently to enact policies to protect children, tragically, 1 in 10 adults report experiencing sexual abuse before their 18th birthday. In some parts of the world, one out of every two children have experienced child sexual abuse. Because of the shame, stigma, and fear associated with their experience, sixty percent of victims never disclose their abuse. Many of these individuals suffer in silence, often living anguished lives. If they do not get the help they need to heal, they will likely experience long-term consequences to their physical and mental health, wellbeing, and economic independence.

Child sexual abuse is a serious global public health crisis impacting our nation and the world. We believe survivors of child sexual abuse deserve to know that their lives matter, that what they experienced was unjust, and that healing is possible. We believe the time has come for all nations to stand with us, speak out, commit resources, and work together to protect children against sexual abuse and help those who experienced child sexual abuse to heal.

We ask that you join us in solidarity by proclaiming the April 8 World Day for Child Sexual Abuse Prevention, Healing, and Justice, a national day of observance in the United States. We believe this action will help raise funding, restore justice, bring healing to survivors of child sexual abuse, and make the world a safer place for all children.

Thank you for considering our request.

Respectfully
Community of Survivors and Advocates Supporting the April 8 World Day for Child Sexual Abuse Prevention, Healing and Justice

Jennifer Wortham, Dr.PH, Founder, April 8 Collaborative. Executive Director, Initiative on Health, Religion, and Spirituality, Harvard University

Melissa Merrick, Ph.D, Co-founder April 8 Collaborative. President & Chief Executive Officer Prevent Child Abuse America

Daniela Ligiero, PhD, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. Executive Director & CEO Together for Girls

Marian Simmons-St.Clair, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. International President, General Federation of Women’s Clubs

Asher Lovy, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. Director Community Organizing ZA’AKAH

Col. Don Christensen, USAF (Ret), Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. President, Protect Our Defenders

Gerald J. McGlone, SJ, PhD, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative, Senior Research Fellow Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, Georgetown University

Tyler VanderWeele, PhD, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. Professor, and Director, Human Flourishing Program at Harvard University

Miguel Prats, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. Founder and President of the Maria Goretti Network

Stacie Schrieff LeBlanc, M.Ed., J.D., Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. President American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children

Michael Hoffman, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. Past President, Prevent Child Abuse Illinois

Lyndon Haviland, MPH, DrPH, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. Distinguished Scholar, Chair, CUNY School of Public Health Foundation

Katelyn N. Brewer, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. President & CEO, Darkness to Light

Kevin A. Trapani, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. Co-Founder and CEO, The Redwoods Group

Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. Executive Vice President, The New York Board of Rabbis

Rev. Dr. A.R. Bernard, Sr., Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. Senior Pastor, Christian Cultural Center

Anne Lee, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. Founder Darkness to Light

Dr. Paul Zeitz, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. Survivor & Executive Director, Build A Movement 2022

Pellagia Gambiza, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. Executive Director, Shine on Sierra Leone

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Victor Vieth, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. Chief Program Officer, Zero Abuse Project

Zach Hiner, Co-founder, April 8, Collaborative. Executive Director, Survivor Network for those Abused by Priests (SNAP)

Rabbi Diana Gerson, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. Assoc. Executive Vice President, The New York Board of Rabbis

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Denise McCaffrey, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. Executive Director, Prevent Child Abuse Illinois

Jetta Bernier, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. Executive Director, MassKids & the Enough Abuse Campaign

Murray Shane, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. President, Male Survivors

Natoschia Scruggs, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. Director, End FGM/C U.S. Network

Paul McEntire, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. Executive Vice President/Chief Operations Officer YMCA OF THE USA

Anwar Khan, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. President, Islamic Relief USA

Gracie French, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. Founder and President, Army of Survivors

Howard Taylor PhD, Co-founder, April 8, Collaborative. Executive Director, End Violence Partnership

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Community of Survivors and Advocates Supporting the
April 8 World Day for Child Sexual Abuse Prevention, Healing and Justice

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Brendan Case, Th.D., Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. Associate Director, Human Flourishing Program, Harvard University

Barbara A. Bettin, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. President/CEO, YMCA of Lincoln, NE

Abigail Farris Rogers, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. President & CEO, YMCA OF GREATER RICHMOND

Pastor David Dankwah, Director of Faith and Religious Community Engagement, April 8 Collaborative

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Stephen Ives, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. President, YMCA OF GREATER HOUSTON

Sarah Smart, Director of Research, April 8 Collaborative

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Chad M. Hart, Co-founder, April 8 Collaborative. CEO, Hopkins County Family YMCA

Sage Williams, Director of Global Affairs, April 8 Collaborative

Darien Laird, Director of Communications, April 8 Collaborative

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