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## STIFFENED U.S. APPROACH TO ILLEGAL BORDER CROSSINGS WILL SEPARATE FAMILIES

*Under new policy, adults may be detained while asylum cases are considered*

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WASHINGTON – The Trump administration plans to step up the prosecution of parents who cross the U.S. border illegally with their children, separating more families in hopes of deterring such crossings, officials said.

The policy has been under review at the Department of Homeland Security and was being announced in San Diego on Monday by Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Thomas Homan, who is acting as director of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

“If you cross the Southwest border unlawfully, then we will prosecute you. It’s that simple,” Mr. Sessions said in a speech Monday in Arizona. He said DHS would refer 100 percent of illegal border crossers to the Justice Department for prosecution and that Justice would take up “as many of those cases as humanly possible until we get to 100 percent.”

Most of the adults who cross with children come from violence-ravaged Central American countries of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador and are seeking asylum in the U.S. Under the new policy, adults will still be able to apply for asylum, but they may be detained while their cases are considered.

Children will be treated as if they had arrived in the U.S. without an adult. Unaccompanied children from countries other than Mexico and Canada are placed with family or in shelters while their cases are considered by immigration courts, a process that can take years. Unaccompanied children from Mexico and Canada are routinely sent home after just a few days.

Under current policy, many families are released while their asylum cases are processed.

Hundreds of children have already been separated from their parents. The Department of Health and Human Services, which is responsible for separated children, puts the figure at 700 since October. The new policy is expected to result in far more children separated as a result of the stepped up prosecutions.

The new policy has been under discussion for months, but officials have held off in part because of the sensitivities of removing children from their parents.

Inside DHS, however, senior officials have argued that prosecuting parents for illegally crossing is the best way to deter future migrants. Under a decades-old federal court settlement, the government can’t jail immigrant children. So if the administration is going to jail adults, it must take the children away first.

Last month, 9,647 people traveling in families were apprehended at the southwest border, and almost 50,000 were since the start of the fiscal year.

This policy only applies to people who try to cross the border illegally, not those who arrive at ports of entry and request asylum.

Ahead of this announcement, the Justice Department said it was sending additional prosecutors to the border in anticipation of an increased workload.

Crossing the border without authorization is a misdemeanor for first offenses. It can be a felony for people previously removed from the U.S

The announcement was first reported by the Los Angeles Times.

Mr. Sessions said in a speech last month that he had directed federal authorities to prosecute as many first-time illegal border crossers as "is practicable." At the time, he didn't specify whether parents traveling with their children would be prosecuted criminally.

Prosecuting first-time border crossers is not new. During the Bush administration, a so-called zero-tolerance zone was established in the Border Patrol's Del Rio Sector in West Texas. Since the mid-2000s, just about any adult caught crossing the border there has been prosecuted. The exception had been parents traveling with their children. The prosecution effort was expanded to other parts of the border, then scaled back in recent years in part because of a lack of resources, including jail space, and because the number of people caught crossing the border illegally dropped to levels last seen in the early 1970s.

Arrests at the border remain similarly low today, though Trump administration officials, including Mr. Sessions and Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen, have described the situation at the border as a "crisis."

The number of families and unaccompanied children crossing the border has been a concern since border agents were overwhelmed by such immigrants in 2014 amid a surge in gang violence and other dangerous conditions in Central America. The number of families caught at the border plummeted in 2015 after the Obama administration started jailing those groups, but it rose again in recent years.