

## **Interfaith Platform on Humane Immigration Reform**

As our diverse faith traditions teach us to welcome our brothers and sisters with love and compassion—regardless of their place of birth—we call on the new Administration and 111<sup>th</sup> Congress to enact humane and equitable immigration reform in 2009.

We call for immigration reform because each day in our congregations, service programs, health-care facilities, and schools we witness the human consequences of a broken and outdated system. We see the exploitation of undocumented workers and the plight of separated families, as well as the escalation of community fear due to indiscriminate raids and local police acting as federal immigration agents. Humane immigration reform would help put an end to this suffering, which offends the dignity of all human beings.

The Hebrew Bible tells us: "The strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as the natives among you, and you shall love them as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 19:33-34). In the New Testament, Jesus tells us to welcome the stranger, for "what you do to the least of my brethren, you do unto me" (Matthew 25:40). The Qur'an tells us that we should "do good to...those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer that you meet" (4:36). The Hindu Taittiriya Upanishad tells us: "The guest is a representative of God" (1.11.2).

Therefore, we call on the new Administration and 111<sup>th</sup> Congress to commit to:

### **Uphold family unity as a priority of all immigration policies**

Recognizing the importance of families to the creation of healthy individuals and strong communities, we call on the new Administration and Congress to 1) expeditiously reunite immigrant families separated due to lengthy visa backlogs; 2) revise family preference categories and per-country caps to prioritize family unity; and 3) remove bars to reentry and adjustment of status for individuals seeking to reunite with their family members. Attempts to devalue the family, such as denying birthright citizenship to the children of immigrants or placing family-based and employment-based visa applicants in competition with each other on a point-based or other system, must be rejected in order to maintain and promote family unity.

### **Create a process for undocumented immigrants to earn their legal status and eventual citizenship**

We urge the Administration and Congress to enact immigration reform that allows undocumented immigrants and their families to earn lawful permanent residency upon the satisfaction of reasonable criteria, with a pathway to citizenship. The workability of such a program should not be hindered by overly punitive criteria, such as mandating that immigrants leave the country or pay exorbitant fees, or by making the process conditional upon the implementation of enforcement measures. Communities and congregations around the country are prepared to provide legal services to those eligible, as people of faith are committed to an effective and humane system that keeps families together and values the dignity of our friends and neighbors.

### **Protect workers and provide efficient channels of entry for new migrant workers**

We call for an expansion of legal avenues for workers who seek to migrate to the United States to work in a safe, legal, and orderly manner. Their rights must be fully protected, including the ability to bring their families with them, travel as needed, change their place of employment, and apply for lawful permanent residency and eventually citizenship. As currently structured, electronic employment verification programs have proven detrimental to both employers and employees due to increased discrimination and unfair hiring and firing practices. All workers benefit, however, from the enforcement of health, safety, wage, and hour laws, as well as the right to peacefully organize.

### **Facilitate immigrant integration**

Many immigrants desire to naturalize but lack the necessary tools. The U.S. immigration system should empower them to this end by providing financial support to state and local governments and community organizations that offer language and civics education, outreach, and naturalization application assistance. Citizenship should be made more affordable by reducing naturalization fees and making fee waivers more easily accessible. Moreover, the processing of application backlogs and security checks should be streamlined to reduce waiting times. Counterproductive laws prohibiting immigrants from accessing social services and mandating that local police act as immigration officials should be revoked. These barriers to integration decrease community safety and discourage immigrants from pursuing education and community involvement. Faith based organizations and congregations around the country will continue to assist in integration efforts by providing social services and helping immigrants learn English, find jobs, and thrive in the United States.

### **Restore due process protections and reform detention policies**

Immigration policies should respect human rights and ensure due process for all persons. We have witnessed how indiscriminate immigration raids have caused trauma and hardship for thousands of individuals. Such raids separate families, destroy communities, and threaten the basic rights of immigrants and U.S. citizens alike. The suffering caused by the increase and severity of Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids in homes and workplaces underscores the problems with current U.S. immigration policies and the urgent need for reform. Many faith organizations administer services to those impacted by raids, as well as to immigrants in detention facilities. Witnessing the toll of incarceration on detainees, their families and our communities, we urge the new Administration and Congress to reduce the use of detention for immigrants and improve detention conditions by enacting clear, enforceable reforms that include rigorous medical treatment standards and increased access to pastoral care, legal counsel and legal orientation programs. Furthermore, the government should expedite the release of individuals who pose no risk to the community and expand the use of community-based alternatives to detention, which are more humane and cost effective.

### **Align the enforcement of immigration laws with humanitarian values**

For the past twenty years, the federal government has dramatically increased fence construction, border patrol presence, and the deportation of immigrants, which have proven ineffective at decreasing undocumented immigration. During this time, we have witnessed the desecration of sacred sites and the violation of environmental and religious freedom laws, as well as the unnecessary suffering of community members whose loved ones have suffered or died seeking entry into the United States. Currently, vast resources are being used for fence construction and the mass arrests, detention, and deportation of immigrants who contribute to the U.S. economy and culture. To truly decrease undocumented immigration, the United States should improve access to the legal immigration system by increasing the number of ports of entry, expanding visa availability, and eliminating application backlogs to increase processing efficiency. Border policies must be consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect, while allowing the United States to implement its immigration laws and identify and prevent the entry of persons who commit dangerous crimes. All immigration laws must respect the dignity of all persons, prioritize the cohesiveness of families and communities, recognize the economic contributions of immigrants, and uphold our moral obligations to provide refuge and welcome the stranger.

### **Immigration: A matter of human rights**

As people of faith, we call attention to the moral dimensions of public policy and recommend reforms that uphold the God-given dignity and rights of every person, each of whom are made in the image of God. We are dedicated to immigration reform because we value family unity, justice, equity, compassion, love, and the humane treatment of all persons. It is our collective prayer that the new Administration and 111<sup>th</sup> Congress enact just immigration reform based on these tenets.