



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 111th Congress to enact humane and equitable immigration reform in 2009.

While we hear the voices of our brothers and sisters for a more just way, we also hear the voices that fear the migrant. We understand the fears, but we believe that the treatment of the immigrant is a core religious value and to welcome the stranger is to welcome a child of God. Our prayer is to transform these dissonant voices into a symphony of concern for the strangers in our midst.

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). In our learnings and discoveries of all holy writings we are called to love the sojourner out of our own shared experiences.

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congregations, service programs, health-care facilities, and schools we witness the human consequences of a broken and outdated system.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 plight of separated families, and children afraid of returning home to a parentless house. We see the exploitation of undocumented workers as well as the escalation of community fear due to indiscriminate raids and local police acting as federal immigration agents. Additionally, the aging U.S. labor force will soon be unable to support programs such as Social Security without an additional influx of foreign born workers.¹

Our broken immigration system benefits no one. It offends the dignity of all human beings. As people of faith, we pray to end this unjust condition by enacting human immigration reform.

Therefore, we call on the Obama Administration and 111th 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 are not calling for amnesty. Instead 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



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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. As people of faith we cannot support the exploitation of the migrant's labor and economic contributions to the United States. We believe the immigrant worker should have access to livable wages and a safe working environment.

Facilitate immigrant integration

Many immigrants desire to naturalize but lack the necessary tools. 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, fear 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

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.

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.



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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.

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 believe fundamental human rights such as the right to migrate and the right to support a family are critical. 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 Obama Administration and 111th Congress enact just immigration reform based on these tenets.

ⁱ Alan Greenspan (Chairman Federal Reserve Board). U.S. Congress. Senate Special Committee on Aging. "Global Aging: Opportunity or Threat for the U.S. Economy?" (Date 2/27/2003).