

AN INTERFAITH CALL FOR IMMIGRATION REFORM

ARIZONANS FOR IMMIGRATION REFORM, JANUARY 22, 2010

As people of many diverse faith traditions, yet with one voice, we call on the 44th President of the United States and the 111th Congress to enact humane and comprehensive immigration reform now. Our diverse faith traditions challenge us to welcome the stranger among us with compassion and hope, trusting in God's generosity. We respect the rule of law; but our immigration laws do not fit the reality of our communities and our nation, leading to growing fear and abuse of immigrants. A nation's moral stature can be measured by the way it treats the most vulnerable in its midst. Our prayer is that we may find common ground, address the legitimate concerns posed by immigration, and heal our broken immigration system through a just transformation of the law.

In our holy writings, we are called to love sojourners, and to integrate them into our communities. 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). To welcome the stranger is to welcome a child of God.

Arizona is ground zero for our nation's broken immigration policies. At our borders and in our congregations, schools, workplaces and service programs, we witness the human consequences of an inadequate, outdated system. Border communities strain to accommodate the newcomers; families suffer long periods of separation; undocumented workers are exploited and live in fear of indiscriminate raids by law enforcement; and increasingly nativist local legislation scapegoats immigrants, fueling anti-immigrant fervor and planting distrust of all public officials in the hearts of migrants. No one – businessmen, immigrants, policymakers – finds the law to be a coherent guide to the complex questions our communities face. It offends the dignity of all human beings. As people of faith, we pray to end this injustice by enacting comprehensive immigration reform.

Together, we call on President Obama and the 111th Congress to commit to the following key principles for immigration reform:

SUPPORT MEASURES TO ADDRESS THE ROOT CAUSES OF MIGRATION

Our traditions recognize that all the goods of the earth belong to all people. All persons have the right to find in their own countries the economic, political, religious and social opportunities to live in dignity, provide for their families, and achieve a full life through the use of the gifts bestowed upon them; yet they also have the right to migrate when there is no other way to support their families. As a nation, we can help create the conditions that will give people an alternative to migration by supporting organizations working to reduce poverty in developing nations and by adopting fair trade policies, fostering equitable development for all.

CREATE A PROCESS FOR UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS TO EARN LEGAL STATUS AND CITIZENSHIP

The mass deportation of undocumented persons here now is extremely costly and virtually impossible; regularizing status is not only possible but brings economic benefit for all. We are not calling for amnesty; but rather we urge immigration reform that allows undocumented migrants and their families to earn lawful permanent residency with a pathway to citizenship through appropriate steps such as registration, background checks, learning English, and payment of reasonable fees. Immigrants who regularize their status would wait their turn for citizenship, in keeping with principles of fairness for all immigrants. Overly

punitive criteria, such as exorbitant fees or mandating that immigrants leave the country, or making the process conditional upon complete success of border enforcement measures, would be counterproductive and should be avoided.

UPHOLD FAMILY UNITY AS A PRIORITY IN IMMIGRATION POLICIES

Our faith traditions are also deeply rooted in the sanctity of the family, the essential institution for the development 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) prioritize family unity in the immigration process; 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 system, must be rejected in order to maintain and promote family unity.

PROTECT WORKERS AND PROVIDE LEGAL AVENUES FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

The outdated immigration system denies an orderly process for immigrants to enter legally or legalize their situation, and prevents communities from tapping the talents and potential of valuable contributors to our society and economy. We call for an expansion of legal avenues for migrant workers whom our nation will need in order to meet our future workforce needs. Since human work participates in God's activity of creation, workers' 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. Care should be exercised with electronic employment verification programs, which have resulted in increased discrimination and unfair hiring and firing practices. All workers benefit from the enforcement of health, safety, wage, and hour laws, as well as the right to organize peacefully. As people of faith we must protect the dignity of migrants' labor and respect their economic contributions to the United States.

RESTORE DUE PROCESS PROTECTIONS AND REFORM DETENTION POLICIES

Immigration policies should respect the rights and inherent human dignity of migrants and ensure due process for all. Indiscriminate immigration raids by opportunistic local law enforcement officials 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, underscoring the problems with current U.S. immigration policies and the urgent need for reform.

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 and legal counsel. Furthermore, we call on the government to expedite the release of individuals who pose no risk to the community and to expand the use of humane and cost-effective community-based alternatives to detention.

FACILITATE IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

One may be a stranger for a time but it is unjust for immigrants to remain strangers "outside the gates" through exclusion from full participation in American society for the long run. Many immigrants desire to naturalize but lack the necessary tools. Immigration reform policies should streamline the naturalization process, by processing application backlogs and expediting security checks 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.

ALIGN IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT WITH HUMANITARIAN VALUES

Our traditions also recognize the right of sovereign nations to control their territories and impose reasonable limits on immigration; however, the more powerful economic nations, which have the ability to protect and feed their own residents, have an obligation to accommodate migration flows whenever possible. 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 immigration laws that identify and prevent the entry of persons who commit dangerous crimes. 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. Immigration reform is a key element to ensuring our country's safety because it would allow the federal government to focus on genuine threats posed by those seeking to do the country harm, rather than on individuals who lack status but have committed no other crimes and desire to make a positive contribution to this country.

IMMIGRATION REFORM: FOR IMMIGRANTS BY A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS

The United States is a country of immigrants. Our nation was founded on a covenantal understanding of community: in the Constitution, we agreed to unite together, as immigrants from many nations, under one flag, one God, for the common good of all. Today as a people of faith, we call attention to the moral dimensions of public policy, and recommend reforms which uphold the God-given dignity of every person, made in the image of God. Fundamental human rights such as the right to migrate and the right to support a family are critical to the repair of our nation's immigration policies. Because we value family unity, justice, equity, compassion, love, and the humane treatment of all persons, we dedicate ourselves, in our teaching and our witness, to calling for immigration reform. It is our collective prayer that President Obama and 111th Congress enact just immigration reform based on these tenets.