

Immigration through the Lens of Faith



Reform Our Immigration System And Protect All Workers

A statement of the Board of Directors of Interfaith Worker Justice (February, 2013)

Interfaith Worker Justice affirms that all workers must be honored and treated with dignity and justice. When we allow immigrant workers to be exploited, we lower the standards for all workers, native born and immigrant, current and future. As people of faith, we recognize and honor the social and economic contributions made by immigrant workers, regardless of their national origin or immigration status. Our immigration system is broken — workers are exploited and families are being separated — and we all suffer as a result.

We know that people of good will have different views, and that some feel that undocumented immigrants take jobs and resources from those who were born in this country or have become legal residents or citizens. But we decry that the debate has become racialized, and that immigrants are stigmatized and blamed for economic problems that greed, unregulated markets, and the lack of coherent government jobs policies have created. Reforming our immigration laws and their enforcement is morally imperative and fundamental to restoring justice and equity in the workplace and the community.

We must also understand that migration occurs in the context of a global economy, we must understand and address U.S. trade and foreign policies that can weaken the economies of other countries and increase migration. We call on our political, business, religious, and labor leaders to maintain civility and respect in the debates over comprehensive immigration reform and uphold these principles:

- **Comprehensive and humane policies for future migration:** We must provide a pathway to citizenship for all undocumented immigrants and their families. Comprehensive Immigration must preserve family unity and ensure the road to citizenship includes all eleven million undocumented immigrants. Reform of the system should remove bars to reentry and adjustment of status for those seeking to reunite with family. Spouses and minor children of lawful permanent residents should be reclassified as immediate relatives to ensure that these individuals are reunited as quickly as possible. Family visas should not be placed in competition with employment visas.
- **Labor, civil, and employment laws must be vigorously enforced for all workers:** Immigration policies should coordinate with labor, health and safety laws to ensure that all people can work with dignity. Laws governing wages, hours, health, and safety should be strictly enforced, the ability to organize protected, and remedies to redress workplace grievances made available to all workers, regardless of immigration status. Employers must not be able to use enforcement or employer sanctions to block workers' rights to organize and enforce workplace standards.
- **Countering cruel immigration enforcement:** Immigration reform must include a complete reform of our country's cruel, irrational, and dehumanizing immigration enforcement system. Because current U.S. immigration policy and enforcement results in employer manipulation and abuse, leaving immigrants and American-born workers to suffer the consequences, we believe any reform should include access to justice and due process, civil,

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labor and employment rights, and public safety. Reform must stop deportations that tear apart families and end dangerous programs that involve local law enforcement with ICE. Our priorities include the immediate suspension of immigration arrests and deportations, ending collaboration between police, ICE, and labor enforcement, terminating the Secure Communities Program, and providing protections for workers who expose civil rights violations related to immigration enforcement.

- **Future Flow: A system to determine the issuance of visas for workers must be based on the needs of the American economy at any given time, without regard to race, ethnicity, or country of origin.** Immigration reform must ensure that workers who come in the future have the right to organize, join as members of workers' centers and unions, and work together with U.S. workers in their sector to ensure dignified workplace standards. Our priorities include allowing temporary workers

to change employers, including worker centers in the process of identifying local workforce availability, setting wages and workplace rules for temporary workers in a way that protects both temporary workers and the U. S. labor market, ensuring temporary workers involved in a labor dispute can remain in the U. S., change employers, and continue to work, and include a humane path to citizenship for temporary workers and their families.

The current system sets arbitrary numbers of visas to be issued each year, with quotas based on country of origin. The number of available visas should be increased significantly to address the growing backlog of applications by recapturing immigrant visas lost to bureaucratic delays and rolling them over to the next fiscal year.

***You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him,
for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.***

— Exodus 22:21

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