

NNIRR's first 25 years:

A chronology of activities, issues and struggle in the human rights of all migrants

The National Network has always connected its history to the valiant and sometimes tragic efforts of early organizers for the rights of the foreign born, especially during the early decades of the past century, when community leaders, labor organizers, faith-based activists, writers, students, artists and visionaries dedicated their lives to fight for the rights of migrant workers from Mexico, the Philippines, China, Japan, the Caribbean, and Latin American countries.

More recently, during the 1970s, Mexican, Filipino, Arab, and other immigrant communities, influenced in part by the civil rights movement and nationwide struggles for ethnic studies, began organizing among documented and undocumented workers, forming organizations that fought racial discrimination, deportation threats, union rights, and against immigration raids.

In the mid-1970s, the first immigration legislation reform debates had spawned in Congress, and among various proposals the Rodino bill, later becoming the Simpson-Rodino bill—was a precursor to the final Simpson-Mazzoli bill introduced in the early 1980s. And by the early 1980's, multi-national and multiracial regional coalitions had surfaced in Washington, California, Texas, Illinois, New York and other states.

1985

The Bay Area Committee to Stop the Simpson-Mazzoli Bill and groups across the country coalesced to organize a National Day of Justice for Immigrants and Refugees on October 18, 1985 in a national effort to stop deportations and pressure Congress for fair immigration policies in opposition to the Simpson-Rodino-Mazzoli proposals.

1986

The National Network was born at the National Conference on Immigrant Rights, which brought together grassroots groups, advocates, civil rights groups, and unions to deliberate over the immigration legislative agenda. Later that same year, Congress approved the Immigration Reform and Control Act, providing legalization for certain undocumented workers, including agricultural workers and implementing employer sanctions—making it illegal for employers to hire without proof of authorization to be in the country. Congress included anti-discrimination measures in IRCA and promised to “sunset” employer sanctions if they were found to create racial discrimination. IRCA set in motion a whole new role for the immigrant rights movement.

1988 - 1989

A report on the impact of employer sanctions by the General Accounting Office, mandated by Congress, found that employer sanctions created new forms of racial discrimination in employment, housing, and other areas of U.S. society. Nonetheless, Congress failed to end employer sanctions. The National Network organizes a broad-based campaign calling on Congress to fulfill its mandate and end employer sanctions.



1990

The National Network's conference, "Immigrant Rights: A Civil Rights Issue for the 90s," brought together 400 grassroots groups from across the country in Berkeley, to define the immigrant rights' movement as a cause of civil rights and racial justice. Promoting the intersections of social justice issues, the National Network crossed boundaries—border-lines, class-lines, gender-lines, racial-lines—and framed an immigrant rights analysis of human rights for all people.

Together with MALDEF, the National Network organized the California Delegation against Hate Violence and led an investigation on human rights abuses and hate violence against migrants in the San Diego-Tijuana border area.

In August, the U.S. declared war on Iraq, to repel the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in dispute over control of oil fields; President George Bush called for the "New World Order," launching military mobilization to the Middle East, while anti-war mobilizations called for "No Blood for Oil."

The Immigration Act of 1990 severely curtailed due process rights for those in deportation proceedings.

On Dec. 18, the UN General Assembly approves the International Convention for the Protection of Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

1991

As U.S. bombing of Iraq began on MLK's birthday, the U.S. also unleashed immigration- related repression. Over five million migrant workers—Arabs, Palestinians, Kuwaitis, and Iraqis—were forcibly displaced and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis died in the bombings. The National Network denounced the war and its debilitating impacts.

A first national conference on immigrant and refugee women, emerging from the National Network's workshop on immigrant women in at the 1990 conference, is organized to broaden gender awareness and spotlight organizing among immigrant women.

1992

The anti-immigrant national lobby group, FAIR, launched a public campaign targeting immigration as the source of economic problems; population control advocates opposed immigration and called for a moratorium. California Governor Pete Wilson fueled the debate, saying, "there is a limit to what we can absorb," and blaming immigrants for depleting state resources.

Los Angeles Police Department cracked down on Latino immigrants during the community reaction to the "not-guilty" verdict in the Rodney King police brutality case.

The National Network formed the Urgent Response Network to respond to INS human rights abuses along the US-Mexico border. Haitian refugees were detained and deported in boatloads following the overthrow of the Aristide government.

1993

The National Network organized against the "greening of hate," the rhetoric of population growth due to immigration as the main cause of environmental degradation.

We went online with the organization's first electronic list-serve for immigrant rights, linking activists and advocate groups from across the country in a new way.

1994 - 1995

California's anti-immigrant Proposition 187 brought the debate—with the focus on undocumented immigration – to the national media and fueling a more widespread anti-immigrant backlash.

The National Network participated in the founding of the International Migrants Rights Watch Network—now Migrants Rights International—at the UN Conference on Population and Development in Cairo.

1996

The National Network partnered with the American Friends Service Committee on a critical analysis to "reframe the immigration debate," and committed to developing community-oriented educational tools. The National Network also provided information, analysis and advocacy guides to oppose a trio of national bills with anti-immigrant provisions: welfare reform, the anti-terrorist bill and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act. The passage of these bills drew upon heightened anti-immigrant sentiment fueled by Prop 187 in California and deliberate hate-mongering by the Right.

1997

Immigration raids on worksites and neighborhoods dramatically increased, and the National Network launched the National INS Raids Task Force to share information, monitor, and document rights abuses.

1998

With significant growth in punitive enforcement, the National Network focused its national conference on, "The Challenge for Human Rights: Confronting Immigration Enforcement Today," which brought together over 450 grassroots activists and advocates in Los Angeles. This was followed by a National Week of Action Against INS Raids which highlighted a major national report, "Portrait of Injustice: The Impact of Immigration Raids on Families, Workers, and Communities." Local activists traveled to

Washington, DC to meet with congressional members on their concerns while local events protesting raids were held in twenty-seven cities nationwide.

1999

The National Network collaborated with the National Organizers' Alliance to establish the Immigrant Community Organizing Working Group, to help strengthen immigrant community organizing and networking.

The National Network piloted new “dialogue” tools developed as part of BRIDGE—Building a Race and Immigration Dialogue in the Global Era, based on the “reframing” project. The exchanges in six cities among diverse communities centered on the intersection of globalization, immigration, and race.

On Día de los Muertos, the National Network, working with the Immigration Law Enforcement Monitoring Project, coordinated nationwide activities to raise awareness. Public displays of crosses, representing those who died crossing the border, capture public and media attention.

2000

The National Network mobilized a delegation of immigrant and refugee women to participate in “Beijing+5” activities in New York, five years after the UN Conference on Women, and produced the report, “Hands that Shape the World: Conditions of Immigrant Women in the U.S. 5 Years after the Beijing Women’s Conference.”

With National Organizers Alliance, the National Network brought together over sixty immigrant community organizers together in a lively retreat to reinforce the need for community organizing as a key strategy in the immigrant rights movement.

Heeding emerging calls for legalization from immigrant communities around the country, the National Network coordinated a national planning committee and meeting on legalization in Los Angeles with some 90 community organizers, advocates and union representatives to share information, analysis, and plans on the fast-moving issue of legalization.

2001

Organizers of a new “National Legalization Campaign” met in Washington, D.C., in March, visiting congressional offices and meeting with advocates to share plans to push for legalization.

National Network representatives attended preparatory meetings for the UN World Conference Against Racism and Xenophobia in Quito and in Geneva, and over 50 delegation members gathered for a human rights

training and preparatory conference in the lead-up to the UN conference in September. The National Network “shadow report” to WCAR, “From the Borderline to the Colorline: A Report on Anti-Immigrant Racism in the United States” took issue with heightened racism and institutionalized discrimination against immigrants in the U.S. The National Network coordinated a delegation of over sixty immigrant rights representatives to WCAR, and helped to lead workshops, strategy sessions and media events in Durban, South Africa.

September 11: As many delegates returned from the Durban conference, the terrorist attacks shifted the National Network’s attention to renewed attacks on immigrants and immigration as part of the backlash and the new U.S. “war against terrorism.”

2002

The socio-political environment following 9/11, proved to be one of the most challenging periods in decades for immigrant communities around the U.S. The PATRIOT Act, Operation Tarmac raids, the Alien Absconder Initiative and the NCIC database, the federalization of airport security workers, and other restrictive laws had an immediate and dramatic impact on immigrant rights.

The term “national security” was introduced into the public lexicon by policy-makers and law enforcement authorities. Immigrants and undocumented immigrants in particular, were often identified as threats to national security.

Arabs, South Asians and Muslims were specifically targeted through widespread crackdowns that detained more than 1,200 in its first weeks. Thousands more were terrorized by hate violence – Mosques, Muslim and Arab businesses and service agencies were harassed, fire-bombed, and vandalized. The U.S. government also secretly signed an agreement with Cambodia to deport over 1,400 Cambodian-American permanent residents convicted of “aggravated felonies”.

The second war on Iraq was launched and millions of Iraqis faced occupation and social turmoil.

Over 250 students and allies mobilized in Washington DC to support a proposal to provide legal status to undocumented students, later to evolve into the DREAM Act.

The National Network convened a national meeting of community organizers to assess the state of immigrant rights in this post-9/11 era of national security. This critical meeting focused on collective proactive and defensive strategies.

2003

The National Network condemned the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, with the INS folded into it, in its national report, “Human Rights and Human Security at Risk”. DHS further institutionalized racial profiling with its “special registration” process for over 80,000 men and boys from 25 mainly Muslim or Arab countries. Over 13,000 arrests and deportations took place.

To revive immigration reform, the labor-initiated “Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride” launched from 10 cities, with almost 1,000 immigrant workers, stopping at over 100 cities along the way and culminating in Washington DC. The Freedom Ride continued to New York City for a rally of over 100,000 people – the largest immigrant rally in U.S. history at that time. The National Network coordinated “BRIDGE on the bus,” popular education workshops on the bus caravan.

The AgJobs bill surfaced in Congress, promising a pathway to permanent residency for agricultural workers.

The National Network and other migrant groups, mobilized to Cancun to protest the World Trade Organization and Free Trade Area of the Americas’ policies that impoverish and displace communities in the Global South.

2004

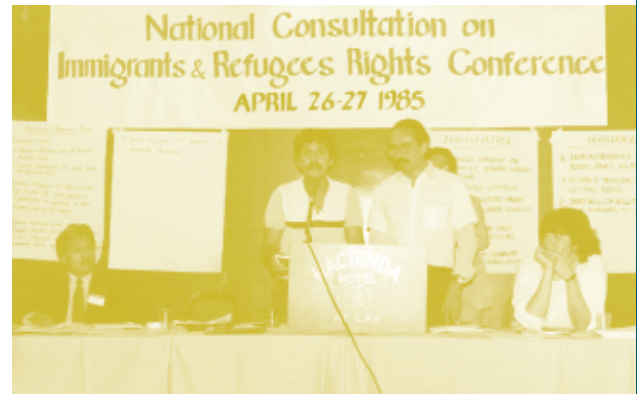
With global partner Migrants Rights International, the National Network members participate in an international migrant caucus and organize workshops, march and rally, street theatre, and other actions at the US Social Forum in Mumbai.

New national initiatives such as the New American Opportunity Campaign or NAOC, and the Fair Immigration Reform Movement or FIRM, promised to push forward national legislation for immigration reform.

After years in development, the National Network formally produced the BRIDGE resource manual, to become a cornerstone popular education resource for immigrant community organizers. The National Network also convened the first annual Immigrant and Refugee Rights Training Institute, or IRRTI, with over 100 grassroots participants.

In California, the National Network joined 6 other collaborative partners to coordinate “Mobilize the Immigrant Vote” or MIV, and registered 20,000 new voters. “Freedom Summer” mobilized youth to do voter registration campaigns in Florida and Arizona. Other immigrant voter initiatives were launched in dozens of other states.

George Bush entered a second term as President and the anti-immigrant Prop 200 passed in Arizona, sparking copycat measures in Alabama, California, Colorado, Georgia and elsewhere.



2005

The National Network and the American Friends Service Committee's Project Voice convened 60 organizations in Phoenix, to learn from local struggles around Prop 200, and to assess the prospects of national immigration reform under an extended Bush regime.

The racist Minutemen Project sent 300 vigilantes to “help secure” the border in Arizona, most of them carrying weapons. The Highlander Education and Research Center coordinated with NNIRR on a strategy session in Tennessee. “Defending Immigrant Communities” brought together African-American and civil rights groups with immigrant communities nationwide on the same days that Hurricane Katrina wreaked havoc on New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region.

Immigrant workers recruited for the Katrina recovery effort faced widespread employer exploitation and government discrimination. The National Network participated in the Southwest Workers Union's “Gulf Coast Justice and Solidarity Tour” and was hosted by organizations such as the Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance.

The National Network and the Bay Area Immigrant Rights Alliance hosted Texas Congresswoman Sheila Jackson-Lee, sponsor of immigration reform legislation that was widely commended by immigrant communities.

The House of Representatives passed the anti-immigrant Sensenbrenner bill, HR 4437, sparking a flurry of opposition by immigrant communities.

2006

The National Network coordinated the “National Statement for Fair and Just Immigration Reform,” with key principles and values that were widely endorsed.

By the spring, immigrant communities and allies mobilized historic marches and rallies around the country; millions took to the streets to condemn anti-immigrant legislation and demand legalization.,

In June, the Coalición de Derechos Humanos, in Tucson, and the National Network organized a National Emergency Border Delegation to the U.S.-Mexico border to raise awareness and protest the hundreds of migrant deaths and humanitarian crisis caused by increased border militarization.

The U.N. High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development was held in New York in September, heralding a new series of governmental fora on migration and development. With global partners, the National Network and its New York members organized a parallel “community dialogue,” lobbying visits to embassies, and rallied outside the U.N.

2007

AFSC's Project Voice and the National Network mobilized over 200 community members to Washington, DC, for visits with Congressional representatives, and held a Congressional briefing and national media conference to highlight the call for principled immigration reforms.

We worked with the ACLU to host the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Migrant Rights, who conducted a mission to the U.S. to investigate immigrant rights conditions.

The National Network organized the Immigrant Rights Caucus and Immigrant Rights Tent at the US Social Forum in Atlanta, and held a press conference upon news of the defeat of immigration reform bills in Congress.

The first Global Forum on Migration and Development, or GFMD, was held in Brussels, Belgium. The National Network and global partners organized a “parallel” community forum that challenged the lack of transparency and democracy of the GFMD.

The National Network supported the first African-American community delegation tour of the U.S. border, organized by the Black Alliance for Just Immigration, or BAJI, and hosted by member group Coalicion Derechos Humanos.

2008

National Network released a new report from HURRICANE—the Human Rights Immigrant Community Action Network, and convened the National Immigrant and Refugee Rights Conference in Houston, where over 600 participants from around the country converged to share stories, strategies and plan joint actions.

Later that year we mobilized to Manila, in the Philippines, to participate in the People's Global Action on Migration, Development and Human Rights (PGA) in conjunction with the GFMD. Then it was on to the historic election of Barack Obama, and our hopes rode high that this president would commit to positive immigration reforms.

2009

Over 3500 people signed our “Open Letter to Barack Obama,” in which we advocated for fair and just immigration reforms, and urged the new Administration to end punitive enforcement programs.

Our community delegation to Washington briefed congressional offices on the negative of programs such as 287g, which heightened racial profiling of immigrants by local police. We shared the second annual report, Guilty by Immigration Status, which included documented cases

of immigration abuse through HURRICANE. The report recounted the racialized patterns of discrimination and terror against local immigrant communities through programs such as 287g and Secure Communities.

2010

As the effects of 287g became more apparent, local protests mounted across the country. The National Network also rallied opposition, including in Arizona, where local organizers led opposition to SB1070, the anti-immigrant legislation sparking national controversy.

Over 200 organizations joined us in appealing to President Obama and the DHS to suspend enforcement operations in immigration communities for the sake of the 2010 Census, as in previous census periods, but to no avail.

Our members' meeting in Detroit on the eve of the US Social Forum reaffirmed our commitment to fight increased enforcement activities, including the militarization of the border, and stressed the importance of broadening our outreach through more effective communications. Our members organize more than a dozen workshops at the Social Forum.

We mobilized 60 delegates to the PGA during the GFMD in Mexico City and Puerto Vallarta, and participated in rich strategizing and networking on critical issues with hundreds of activists from around the world.

We published Excluded and Exploited to critique current global migration policies and programs that rely on exploitation of temporary workers, repressive border policies, and immigration restrictions.

2011

Injustice for All: The Rise of the U.S. Immigration Policing Regime, our third HURRICANE report, pointed to the consolidation of an immigration enforcement infrastructure that supports more than a dozen programs, like Secure Communities, that fuel the criminalization of immigrant communities. By the end of September, the Department of Homeland Security reported record-high levels of deportations.

The National Network took on a full international agenda, helping to convene a workshop on global domestic workers in New York in March; a first meeting, in Geneva in June, on international borders with migrants rights organizers from various global regions; and laid plans for participation in this year's PGA, to be held in Geneva in December in association with this year's GFMD.

10 years after the attacks of 9/11, the National Network is introducing a new popular education tool challenging Islamophobia, to be included in the BRIDGE program.

In the Fall, the National Network partnered with member and allied groups in the Northeast, Southeast and Southwest to convene regional gatherings with LGBT activists and allies to share issues, needs and strategies for addressing the intersection of LGBT and immigrant rights. As a national partner with the Western States Center's Uniting Communities program, the National Network is also sharing additional tools to raise awareness and address homophobia.

In December, several the National Network members and staff will participate in this year's PGA and GFMD in Geneva, once again working with international partners to advance human rights and economic justice perspectives in global migration and development strategies. Later in December, the National Network will once again rally celebrations and protests on International Migrants' Day, December 18 – this year calling attention to the devastating human rights impacts of widespread detentions and deportations.

On Nov. 5, we celebrated our 25th anniversary with a delicious international dinner and inspiring program in Oakland.

