



national network for immigrant and refugee rights

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An Open Letter to President-Elect Barack Obama

Take Action to Ensure the Human Rights, Safety And Well-Being of Immigrant Communities

Dear President-Elect Barack Obama:

We congratulate you on your election as the 44th President of the United States; we look forward to working with you and your Administration in the coming years to bring about the changes that are needed to improve the lives and safety of immigrant and refugee communities in this country.

We urge you, as our next President, to strengthen this country's commitment to human rights for all, and to seek justice for the hundreds of thousands of immigrant workers and families who have suffered from abuse, discrimination and violence.

We ask for your support and action during the first 100 days of your presidency, to end the immigration enforcement actions -- raids, detentions and deportations -- that are causing immeasurable hardships in immigrant communities. Most urgently, we ask for the immediate cessation of all immigration policing and raids where people live, work, worship, study and play.

We believe this action is a necessary pre-requisite to addressing the larger issues of immigration policy and the passage of significant legislative reforms.

We also call on you to:

- **Work with Congress to immediately initiate a series of field hearings on immigration law enforcement and its impacts and effects on our communities** in the interior and the border, with special attention to its effects on the economy, workplace and Constitutional rights.

These hearings must include the voices and experiences of those directly affected by immigration policing and raids. During the last eight years, the Bush Administration's Department of Homeland Security vehemently attacked and

undermined the rights of immigrant and refugees. Families, workers and communities experienced intense policing; hundreds of thousands were detained for immigration status alone and their due process rights blatantly violated and ignored, resulting in deportations. Their testimony is vital to the consideration of immigration reforms and to ensure that the DHS is held accountable for its policies, strategies and practices.

- **Suspend detentions and deportations** while hearings are held and humanitarian policy alternatives are put in place to reinstate due process and the rule of law to immigration services and enforcement.
- **Support a legalization program that offers opportunities to regularize the status for all undocumented immigrants**, without the onerous hurdles of past proposals that would have drastically limited the number of immigrants who could actually legalize. Those proposals would have subjected hundreds of thousands of immigrants and their children to a precarious existence without guarantee of permanent residency at the end of a lengthy conditional process.
- **Uphold family reunification as a core principle of U.S. immigration policy.** We need to expand legal immigration opportunities, expedite processing and resolve the backlog of current, eligible visa applications. We should do away with the harsh obstacles to immigrating, including the “3 and 10 year bars,” unfair and burdensome political asylum procedures, and high income requirements for immigrant sponsors.
- **Insist that due process rights be restored and preserved, to ensure equality before the law for all persons, regardless of their immigration or citizenship status.** We need the protection and expansion of the civil and labor rights of all immigrants, as well as community-based oversight and accountability of the Department of Homeland Security for immigration law enforcement and services.
- **Take action to end the criminalization of immigrants, including:**
 - the repeal of employer sanctions, which have led to problematic employment verification requirements and the criminalization of immigrant workers; an end to the electronic worker verification program and the sending of SSA no-match letters to employers.
 - an end to criminal prosecutions for immigration-related conduct such as unlawful entry, driving without a license, or so-called “identity theft.”
 - an end to immigration enforcement collaboration with local, county and state police as well as other government agencies.
 - the end and roll back of border militarization policies, practices, measures and laws, including the use of high technological surveillance.

- the end to indefinite and mandatory detention.
- an end to the inhumane conditions and treatment of detainees in detention facilities, immigration prisons and DHS-contracted facilities.
- **Strengthen and ensure enforcement of labor law protections for all workers, regardless of citizenship or immigration status.**
- **Oppose guestworker programs in their various forms**, whether they are tied to legalization for undocumented immigrants already living and working here, or as a means for “managing future flows” of immigrants into the United States, especially as components of international trade partnership agreements.
- **Prioritize funding for immigration services** to clear the backlog of pending applications for family reunification visas, green cards, citizenship and services for immigrant integration.
- **Ensure access and support for all public services and benefits including education, health care, and drivers’ licenses.**
- **Support the right of mobility and return for all displaced peoples, refugees, asylum seekers, trafficked persons and migrants.** U.S. policies should be in full compliance with the UN Conventions and Protocols related to the status of refugees and the right to asylum, and we should give particular attention to the plight of displaced women and girls, and include gender-based violence as a basis for refugee status.
- **Commit to addressing migration in our foreign policy and economic agreements.** The U.S. must shift away from the current trend of bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements that exacerbate the displacement of communities. It should also abandon its globally discredited foreign policy emphasis on military intervention and its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We urge you to ensure that U.S. trade, economic and other foreign policies are built upon principles of fair and just diplomatic engagement, and support sustainable development programs, job creation, and fair trade that build viable and healthy communities around the world.
- **Include consideration of the UN Convention for the Protection of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families**, the international standard of human rights protections for all migrants, as you strengthen U.S. recognition and adherence to human rights agreements.

Thank you for supporting the human rights, safety and well-being of immigrants and refugees.