

Immigration - 2009

When strangers reside with you in your land, you shall not wrong them. The strangers who reside with you shall be to you as your citizens; (Leviticus 19:33-34).

Issue

It has been estimated that more than eleven million immigrants are living in the United States without proper legal documents. Millions of these people cannot be found and deported. The United States government has responded to this by building a fence to deter illegal immigrants, raiding the workplaces at which immigrants are employed, and barging into homes to search for undocumented people. A better solution is needed.

Background

Women of Reform Judaism adopted a resolution supporting immigration at its first assembly in 1915 and over the years has continued to call for fair immigration policies. In those resolutions we called for: an end to discriminatory policies; accepting political and religious refugees; opening the doors to Jewish immigration, especially during the 1940's when victims of Nazi Germany desperately sought sanctuary here; and supporting the rights of those entering our borders. Thus, the proper and humane treatment of those within our borders is an ongoing matter of great concern to us.

For the last several years, the U.S. immigration policy has sought to remove undocumented immigrants from our country. Immigration officials have conducted major raids on workplaces, during which immigrants have been arrested en masse, removed from the work site, sent to detention, and deported. Little concern has been shown towards family members who are left behind. Even when women have been temporarily released because they have minor children who would be left alone, they have no means to provide for themselves and their children because they cannot work and by law do not receive government poverty assistance.

The raids terrorize the communities in which they take place because military equipment, including hovering helicopters, has been used. Those not rounded up in the raids are afraid to come out of their homes, send their children to school, and interact in any way in their community. Even school records have been accessed by immigration authorities to help in arresting the undocumented.

Attorneys, the press, and advocacy groups report infringement of immigrant civil rights. Immigration authorities have moved people from one detention facility to another, making it difficult for attorneys who volunteer their time to maintain contact with their clients. Or, as in the Postville, Iowa raid, authorities refused to allow the attorneys to see their clients at their place of detention.

There have also been numerous home invasions by immigration officials without warrants. They have forced their way into people's homes, alleging that they were looking for dangerous fugitives, held the residents at gunpoint, insisted on seeing identifying documents, and then arrested those who could not produce proof that they were in the country legally. Even those with proper documents have felt terrorized in their own homes after these raids.

The United States has sought to prevent illegal immigrants from entering our country from Mexico by building a fence along the border. The fence has not kept immigrants out, but only forced them to use more dangerous places to cross into the United States. Many have died in the desert trying to reach work in the United States.

The United States grants very few visas for unskilled workers to enter legally from Mexico and from Central

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America. This has created long waits for family unification visas and a bureaucracy that causes such delays in renewing visas that people who are legally working in the United States fall into illegal status because their paper work has been delayed or lost.

The New York Times has reported that those who are detained in prisons, jails, and private prisons have often been deprived of proper medical care while their cases have been pending. Several immigrants have died from treatable illnesses in these facilities. Even those with strong claims for political asylum can find themselves imprisoned for more than a year while their cases are pending. Children have also been imprisoned while they await deportation or the processing of their claims for asylum. These children are treated as criminals and receive little if any education and medical care.

On August 6, 2009, the U.S. federal administration announced plans to deal with the flawed immigration detention system. In addition, two bills have recently been introduced in the U.S. Senate that would go a long way to protect the rights of detained immigrants.

Resolution

Women of Reform Judaism urges its U.S. affiliates to:

- 1.Call upon Congress to adopt and the president to sign comprehensive immigration reform legislation that would include a path to legalization for the millions of undocumented immigrants in the United States.
- 2.Advocate humane treatment for all detained immigrants, including proper medical care and educational and other services for children in detention.
- 3.Advocate an end to mass workplace raids and warrantless home invasions as tools for immigration enforcement.
- 4.Support an increase in the number of visas for unskilled workers and streamline the processes for visa renewal and family reunification.