

And you welcomed me...

Human beings leave their homelands for many reasons and they are called by many names: illegal aliens, strangers, asylum-seekers, displaced persons, economic migrants, lawful permanent residents, refugees, temporary workers, and victims of trafficking. Some are forced to flee because of violence, persecution, natural disaster, or intense economic privation. Most migrate in search of a better life, many as part of a family survival strategy. The movement of people from one place to another has remained a constant feature of human history. In an era characterized by the fast and cheaper movement of goods and services around the globe, migrants are the face of globalization. The world's two hundred million migrants often find themselves at the center of economic, social and political debates.

Immigrants have helped shape Maine's culture and economy even prior to its statehood. Today's immigrants from Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East follow in the footsteps of those from Africa, Canada, China and Europe who have come to our state for centuries.

Immigrants have long appreciated Maine for its welcoming people and its way of life, and have made vital contributions to every aspect of Maine's economy, including Maine's agriculture, hospitality, and professional sectors. Today, sources estimate Maine's immigrant population to be over 55,000 persons.

*Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore, Send these, the homeless, the
tempest-tossed, to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!*

(poem inscribed on the Statue of Liberty)

Senate Immigration Plan Inadequate

Reprinted from the Catholic Worker -May 2010

Oakland, CA: The "blueprint" for immigration reform recently released by Senator Chuck Shumer (D-NY) and Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) points to a difficult road ahead for decent, fair immigration reform. The National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights is very concerned that the provisions described by the senators would extend and deepen harsh enforcement practices that have caused trauma and separation for immigration families, fostered racial profiling and led to tragic deaths at the U.S.-Mexico border of migrants seeking a better life.

Surely, tens of thousands of people who recently rallied in Washington and in local areas, want immigration legislation that treats immigrants fairly, that recognizes their dignity and rights. Unfortunately, the blueprint outlined by the senators and praised by President Obama is not an outline for bold and enlightened legislation. As a "starting point" for real congressional engagement, it sets a low bar for the debate, placing harsh and failed enforcement strategies at its heart in hopes of drawing conservative support, regardless of the human rights consequences of such policies. While still vague and without many details, the blueprint emphasizes increases in work-site and border enforcement as an apparent trade-off for a "tough but fair" legalization program. It promises greencards for the "best and the brightest"—more of the "brain drain" scenario and refers to so-called "circular migration" as a rationale to provide temporary worker visas to lower skilled immigrants to work in the U.S. These workers would presumably save their earnings, send remittances home, and then return to their home countries. This is a recipe for disaster, and merely sets up the prospect of more exploited migrant workers with fewer rights, including workers with little access to green cards and who could eventually become undocumented.

The senators acknowledged that Americans support legal immigration, but did not mention changes needed in our core legal immigration program. Instead, they mention that in "20 years" Americans "will embrace more welcoming immigration policies" after the tide of undocumented has apparently been contained. We hope this does not mean that they are not prepared to support important changes to the current legal immigration program emphasizing family unity, as part of the immigration package.

It's bad enough that the "tough but fair" legalization program they describe would further criminalize the undocumented and would create unnecessary barriers to eligible applicants.

When President Barack Obama took office in January 2008, we sent him an Open Letter joined by thousands of community members, rights advocates and allies in faith, labor and civil rights communities. We urged the new President to commit to principles of human rights.

We asked him to end the raids, detentions and deportations that have caused so much hardship in our communities as a prerequisite to a genuine commitment to provide the undocumented with access to legal status. We continue to urge the Administration and members of Congress to focus on core reforms:

- suspend detentions and deportations while humanitarian policy alternatives are in place, and to reinstate due process;
- support legalization without the onerous hurdles of past proposals that will limit applications;
- uphold family reunification as a core principle of immigration policy, and expand and expedite legal immigration;
- end criminalization of immigrants, by repealing employer sanctions, and stopping the militarization of the border and local police collaboration programs; strengthen labor law enforcement for all workers, regardless of citizenship or immigration status;
- ensure immigrant access to services.

Immigration is not just a domestic policy issue; it is tied to policies that create displacement and forced migration. In committing to tackle immigration reform this time around, policymakers also need to ensure that U.S. foreign and economic policies promote global sustainable economic development and environments, job creation and peace, so that migration is an option and not a last resort for economic survival.

We think sometimes that poverty is only being hungry, naked and homeless. The poverty of being unwanted, unloved and uncared for is the greatest poverty. We must start in our own homes to remedy this kind of poverty.

- Mother Teresa

Letters from an imprisoned Immigrant.

Dear Casa Juan Diego,

Allow me to greet you, hoping in God that you will have good health.

After my brief greeting, I will make known to you things that are unknown about the "illegal" immigrant, hoping that my letter will be taken into consideration and that it will not be thrown into oblivion.

I am an illegal immigrant who finds himself deprived of his liberty like thousands of immigrants who find themselves in the same situation as mine. Much is said of the raids that the police and the ICE agency carry out each day en masse, separating families and leaving women and children with out daily sustenance.

But, in truth! Do the the Latino community and the society of this country know what happens to an undocumented immigrant when he is arrested simply for being illegal?

I am one of thousands who fell into the hands of ICE who find ourselves in the category of criminals facing sentences that vary between six months to six years, only for entering this country as an illegal.

Judges and attorneys know that we have no defense and take advantage of us because we don't know the laws or our rights in this country, much less how to defend ourselves judicially, and as typical Latinos we only put down our heads, accepting with resignation the sentences that they impose on us. It does not matter to them that thousands of families are destroyed and children left homeless. What is this racism against immigrants? I was sentenced to 40 months in prison. My crime? Only for having entered again into this country to search for my wife and children. I committed no crime, but I was arrested and taken to Immigration supposedly in order to be deported in two weeks. Those two weeks became a month, that month became 6 months, and those six months became a sentence of 40 months.

God Bless You,

Sincerely, An Immigrant in Detention.



More Deportations Than Ever by Mark and Louise Zwick

Many hoped there might be improvements for immigrants under the leadership of the new Obama administration. Not so!

We have noticed a marked increase in reports and anecdotal evidence in the Houston area regarding deportations. We also get many calls from mothers of small children and pregnant women about the deportations of their husbands.

Now published reports confirm what we have heard, Jeffrey Kaye, writing in the Los Angeles Times, reported on March 23, 2010, that the Obama administration has broken all records on the deportation of undocumented immigrants—marking up a 5% annual increase even over the Bush administration. The L.A. Times article indicates that deportations are exacerbated in slow economic times.