



national network for immigrant and refugee rights

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Community Days of Advocacy For Justice & Human Rights

April 4 - 19, 2009

Keep Your Eyes on the Prize – Just & Fair Immigration Reforms: *Demand Accountability and the Restoration of Rights!*

The National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights is very happy to have you and your organizations participating in the **Community Days of Advocacy for Justice & Human Rights** during Congress's local recess April 4 - 19, 2009.

During the Community Days of Advocacy, community members and groups will present Congressional delegations with their stories and cases of abuses and rights violations taking place in immigration enforcement and services. We will ask for their support to end raids, to suspend all detentions and deportations and investigate the abuses, to restore rights, to implement humanitarian policies and measures of accountability and oversight and to hold hearings with our communities.

Over the next months and years, we expect numerous proposals will be made addressing immigration reform and the rights of immigrants. This will include administrative, policy and legislative initiatives that will be introduced and debated in Congress and in other local, state and national arenas. This will also consist of administrative measures approved by the White House, and which will not go through Congress.

In each of these instances, we need to filter all proposals through the lens of our principles of *justice and human rights* and determine:

- Whether or not they would unite more families or cause more separations and suffering;
- Whether or not migrant deaths and disappearances at the border will end or the rights of immigrants will continue being casualties of "free" trade, national security and the emerging war against drug cartels; and
- Whether or not the labor and civil rights of all immigrants will be protected or immigrant workers will continue enduring servitude in the shadows and languishing in ICE and private prisons.

Raise Your Voices, Stand Up for Immigrant Rights

The calls for just and fair immigration reforms cannot ignore that accountability and humanitarian policies and treatment are needed now.

Ending raids would be a good start. ICE uses raids as a deliberate tool to intimidate communities. But the abuses do not end there. The overwhelming majority of persons that ICE detains and deports are not through high profile, or even workplace, raids.

Stopping raids alone would still leave hundreds of thousands of persons out of the picture -- immigrants who are exploited at work, subjected to squalor and inhumane treatment and abuse in immigration detention and jails, and being denied rights and services. That's why ending raids will not be enough.

As long as the Department of Homeland Security and its agencies in charge of immigration affairs (Citizenship and Immigration Services - CIS, Immigration and Customs Enforcement - ICE and Customs and Border Protection - CBP) are not accountable and do not meet our demands for redress and restoration of rights, immigration reform proposals will ignore - or worse, perpetuate the policies and practices of abuse. This abuse is rooted in the criminalization of status, the deepening militarization of immigration and border control and the inhumane and unjust treatment of immigrants in detentions and deportations. The implementation of new or revised immigration-related programs and policies would likely reproduce the systemic rights violations and abuses that now permeate immigration services and enforcement.

At each of step of the legislative and policy process, we will face many challenges and have opportunities to develop and broadcast our shared principles for socially just immigration reforms.

Community Days of Advocacy

During April 4 - 19, we have an opportunity to establish closer relations with members of Congress and learn where they stand on the issues. We can also present our case for the type of legislative reforms we support. While often complicated, drawn out with intense debates and deal-making, reforms are needed to make fundamental changes in immigration laws that will help improve the safety and well-being of immigrant families, workers and communities. We can urge accountability and restoring rights now to move towards that goal.

Our meetings with Congress are part of community organizing and education and will contribute to continue developing a shared analysis of the changes needed in order to win socially just immigration reforms. At NNIRR, we believe that under the current climate, seeking accountability and redress for immigration law enforcement and border control abuses must drive the demand for fair and just immigration reforms.

During the Community Days of Advocacy we will:

- Deliver a set of urgent recommendations and changes needed and to build our case for socially just immigration reforms.
- Highlight the links and impacts of immigration enforcement and services on local communities by providing stories or cases by affected community members, reinforcing our call for accountability and rights and our case for just and fair reforms.
- Find out where your Congressional delegation stands on the issues, including their interests and other forces and factors shaping their agenda and views.
- Seek to get a commitment of support for accountability, an end to raids, the suspension of detentions and deportations and to hold hearings with our communities so that Congress members can learn about the impacts of immigration policies and practices, and hear the community's recommendations on immigration enforcement and services.
- Build and strengthen relationships between our communities, Congress and other public officials and institutions that influence or impact our communities' needs and rights.
- Train and expand the numbers of community members with the know-how and tools to link organizing strategies with advocacy on the policy, administrative and legislative changes that we want. And,
- Build and strengthen the immigrant rights movement's capacity and vision for socially just immigration reforms and accountability and work to connect to the broader movements for social and economic justice.

Our main message: *Ending Raids Is Not Enough*

When we tell Congress members that, "Ending raids is not enough," we are telling them that abuses and rights violations are endemic to immigration enforcement and services.

ICE raids are the tip of the iceberg. ICE detains and deports less than 2% of all persons through raids! In fiscal year 2008, ICE deported almost 6,000 immigrants through raids, out of a total of 350,000 deported.

Stopping raids will not end the ICE abuses.

ICE raids, or enforcement operations, ignore and violate the rights of immigrant families, workers and communities. ICE and other immigration and border control makes immigrants vulnerable to abuse and exploitation where they live, in the workplace, in the community and in services.

ICE and privately run detention centers and jails subject immigrants to squalor, inhumane treatment and abuse. ICE and other immigration policing use racial profiling and ignore

and violate the due process rights of persons in detention and deportation. Immigration enforcement endangers the rights, safety and health of immigrant families, workers and communities.

Immigrants should not be jailed for immigration status and they certainly should not be jailed in squalor and abused.

All detentions and deportations must be suspended and Congress must investigate the abuses and hold ICE officials and others accountable.

Congress must take immediate steps to restore due process rights and implement humanitarian policies and treatment in immigration services and enforcement.

Instead of jailing immigrants, our government should issue work permits, provide independent legal counsel and access to the courts, and ensure that the civil and labor rights of all workers, regardless of their immigration or citizenship status, are protected and upheld.

Stick to the principles: justice & human rights

Our basic principles should act as a lens to understand how any immigration reform proposal will either protect and enhance our rights or dilute and even undermine them. For example, when assessing any proposal, you can ask, "How will your proposal unite families? Will it protect labor rights? Will it help to decriminalize status and end abuses in detentions and deportations? Will immigration and border control continue to deliberately funnel migrants to enter through the desert and mountainous regions, where thousands have already died or disappeared – or issue enough visas so that people can enter safely and protects their rights?" We must ask if the legislation would expand services to integrate immigrants, end the backlogs, ease access to citizenship and other options -- or will the proposal increase the number of police agents, detention centers and border militarization that causes abuses and migrant deaths.

The Community Days of Advocacy for Justice & Human Rights are part of a larger process to build our collective intelligence on Congress and the state of immigration reforms and policies and other issues that impact immigrant and refugee communities. The Community Days of Advocacy will also help clarify and strengthen our principles and contribute to including more members of our communities in envisioning the type of changes we need. Increasing participation will help build our communities' power to demand justice and human rights.

We have much to do to influence the Obama Administration and members of Congress on the changes and reforms we want, and to transform the political climate of scapegoating and reverse the reliance on policing and deportations. Key to these tasks are our demands for accountability and redress, which are indispensable to achieving broader and socially just immigration reforms.

Make Your Voices Heard and Take Action During the Community Days of Advocacy for Justice & Human Rights!

Get Ready to Meet with Members of Congress

Have a plan

Before your visit *always* meet before hand and assign roles! Roles should include who will *credential* the group, who will take lead on each issue, who will make *the ask* and who will jump in if someone decides to raise an issue the group had not agreed to upfront.

Your Credentials, Your Voices, Your Communities

This is who you are and *who you represent!* You are more than ‘a constituent’. You are a constituent who represents other constituents and you’ll report back to them. Remember, politicians pay attention to numbers.

Everyone is Important: Prepare for Team Work

It is important to follow the plan you set during the pre-meeting. Of course you’ll need to be flexible. Everyone has an important voice and role in the work of getting accountability and presenting our case for socially just immigration reforms.

Ask if they support you!

Why just tell them what you want – *Ask* if they’ll support you! “Can we count on the Senator’s support for legislation based on our proposals for immigration reform?” Listen carefully and ask for clarification if what they say is vague.

The Debrief

It’s important to make sure we’re on the same page leaving the meeting. As a group, review: What did we hear? Did we get what we wanted? What are the next steps? And it’s important to help us get better to evaluate the group. How did we do? As a team? As individuals?

Report-back!

Please make sure you fill out the report-back form and email it or fax it back to us so that we can compile notes and create a shared assessment based on all the meetings that took place. We will have an opportunity to do follow-up visits with members of Congress when we go to Washington, D.C. later this Spring.

Here are some suggested steps to ensure your visit impacts how they will vote on immigration issues:

- 1) **Find out who represents you in Congress.** Go to www.senate.gov and www.house.gov to find out who your Senators and Representatives are.
- 2) **Know your Congressional delegation.** Find out how your Senators and Representative vote on immigration. Their websites and a “Google” search will show how they vote and what they have said about immigration.

- 3) **Schedule a meeting.** Call, email or fax the local offices of your Senators and Representatives to request a meeting. If the member is unavailable, ask to meet with a staffer who works on immigration issues.
- 4) **Tell your story.** You're a constituent, and therefore your Senators and Representatives care about what you think. Tell them why you care about immigration policies; how they impact your family, neighbors and community – all those you care about. Your story is the most important part of the visit.
- 5) **Bring facts.** Support your opinion with fact sheets provided by NNIRR and/or your organization calling for accountability and redress, an end to raids, detentions, and deportations, restoring due process, demilitarizing immigration and border control, and a legalization program with human rights and labor protections for all immigrants and their families.
- 6) **Ask for support and leadership.** Ask what their position is on immigration reform and how they will champion reform by introducing and supporting just and fair immigration reforms. Even if they don't agree with everything you discuss, ask how they will champion the pieces that they do agree with. Ask them to support our call for ending raids and to hold hearings with our communities.
- 7) **Follow up.** Send the Representative or staff you meet with a letter or email thanking them for their time, attaching any documents you mentioned, answering any questions that you were unable to answer during the meeting, and once again making your case for socially just immigration reform.
- 8) **Call Washington, DC.** The Capitol Switchboard (202) 224-3121 can connect you to the DC offices of your Senators and Representatives. Introduce yourself as a constituent and ask for the staffer who works on immigration. Tell them about your meeting with their local office, ask what they are doing to champion immigration reform, and urge them to support socially just and fair immigration policies.
- 9) **Build a relationship.** Call these local and DC staff persons once a week to discuss immigration issues and how your Senator or Representative is voting on the issue. Let them know about events that show your community cares about immigrants and legislation you would like them to support.
- 10) **Connect with your community partners and allies across the country.** After you meet or speak with someone from your Senators' and Representatives' offices, fill out the Report-back Form and email it to Catherine Tactaquin at ctactaquin@nnirr.org or fax it to (510) 465-1885. We will share the report-backs with all participants and use the information to prepare for meetings with Congressional staff members as we continue organizing for accountability, legalization and immigration reforms with justice and human rights!
- 11) **Get others involved!** Get a group of friends to visit the local office of your Senators and Representatives about immigration issues. You can even write a letter to your local newspaper or call your local radio station about these issues.