

Southeast Immigrant Rights Network

Principles and Agenda for Immigration Reform

February 11, 2013

The Southeast Immigrant Rights Network stands together to support fair and just immigration reform. This means immigration policies grounded in respecting and upholding the rights, dignity and humanity of all immigrants and other members of our society. As a network of Southern grassroots groups, statewide coalitions, and social justice organizations, we have witnessed the devastating impact of decades of federal immigration policies and some of the harshest state anti-immigrant laws in the country. These policies and laws have torn families apart, caused thousands of deaths along the US-Mexico border, criminalized hundreds of thousands, and eroded the most fundamental human and civil rights that are supposed to be the foundation of this country.

As the renewed debate around immigration reform re-ignites the hope that these inhumane policies will be permanently reversed, we call upon the Obama Administration to take the first step to address the human rights crisis in our communities by immediately implementing a moratorium on detentions and deportations. We cannot afford to wait for an uncertain and potentially prolonged legislative process around immigration reform to alleviate our communities' suffering.

The Obama Administration must continue litigating against laws such as Alabama's HB 56, Georgia's HB 87 and South Carolina's SB 20, which further criminalize immigrants and infringe upon their human and civil rights. At the same time, we call upon Congress to make clear that immigration authority is limited to the federal government and that state and local governments cannot violate federal constitutional rights in attempts to regulate immigration. Unless Congress makes this clear, these governments will continue seeking ways to restrict the rights of immigrants.

The Obama Administration should also work to ensure that states honor and recognize any provisional or permanent status granted immigrants under immigration reform and oppose any efforts to restrict their rights or access to benefits such as drivers' licenses and in-state tuition.

Finally, we call upon the President and Congress to put forth immigration reform proposals based on the principles of dignity, justice and equality. These proposals should provide opportunities for all undocumented immigrants to permanently regularize their status, expand the availability of legal immigration options, restore due process for all immigrants, demilitarize the border and end the widespread criminalization of immigrants.

We call for fair and just immigration reform that encompasses the following components:

1. An immediate moratorium on detentions and deportations
2. An immediate end to Secure Communities, 287(g) agreements, to all ICE/local enforcement programs, and to prosecution for immigration-related conduct that are non-criminal offenses, such as unlawful entry, driving without a license or other violations committed because of being undocumented. These programs lead to unconstitutional arrests and widespread racial profiling.

3. A legalization process that offers opportunities for all undocumented immigrants to become legal permanent residents , and:
 - is affordable , straightforward and does not create such an unreasonable burden that it discourages people from applying
 - provides the right of return to immigrants who have been deported over the last four years
 - makes waivers available for applicants who fall under the Immigration and Nationality Act's grounds of exclusion
 - Includes the right to work and travel freely while the application is being adjudicated
 - Offers access to all services, benefits and protections available to permanent residents
4. Expansion of opportunities for legal immigration, including:
 - immediate processing of the backlog of pending visa applications
 - increased number of family based visas
 - recognizing same sex marriages/domestic partnerships under the family visa system
 - eliminating harsh obstacles to immigrating or that further separate families, including high income requirements for immigrant sponsors and the 3 and 10 year bans for previous entry
5. End border militarization. The use of drones and other military equipment/tactics used to control human migration across and along the border has created a humanitarian crisis with the deaths of thousands of people and has resulted in the detention and criminalization of tens of thousands of people without deterring unauthorized border crossings.
6. End temporary worker programs entirely. If temporary worker programs continue to exist, they must guarantee fundamental rights and include protections for every worker admitted under the program. Guestworkers should have the right to organize and join unions, if they choose to, be protected against discrimination and sexual harassment, and have safe and fair working conditions. These programs should also:
 - allow workers to change employers, without sacrificing their visa status, like any other employee can
 - de-privatize the foreign labor recruitment market to eliminate fraud, extortion, debt servitude, discrimination, and other human rights violations
 - ensure employers using a foreign worker program have sufficient resources to pay their employees the promised wages and to comply with labor and employment laws
 - give temporary workers immigrant visas that create an eventual path to citizenship for themselves and their immediate family
 - exist only when data shows an economic need for bringing in workers
7. End mandatory electronic verification programs.

We face a historical opportunity to re-envision our commitment to welcoming immigrants to this country in a way that respects their human rights and our collective dignity. As a nation that has driven global policies that have devastated local economies, caused environmental degradation and sparked armed conflict--- all which have fueled massive migration---we have the opportunity to do right by the refugees and immigrants that now call this country home, to live up to the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement, and to make our future one that is inclusive of all people and respectful of each person's dignity.