

The Alabama Faith Council

ALABAMA FAITH COUNCIL STATEMENT ON IMMIGRATION

There is ample evidence that the United States immigration system needs to be reformed. The presence of millions of undocumented immigrants; the exploitation of immigrant workers; divided families; deaths in the desert southwest and on the open seas; people obtaining fraudulent government documents; criminal smugglers and human trafficking; and public frustration are all an indication that the system we have in place does not best serve our economy, our national security, and our local communities. The system we have now also does not reflect our religious traditions and the tradition of hospitality which has defined the United States of America. Any reform of our immigration system must be implemented in a way that is fair, just, and respectful of the dignity and worth of all human beings, balancing the needs and well-being of native born Americans, legal immigrants, and those who are working here but are in our country illegally. Any reform of our immigration system must also address the root causes of the migration of human beings.

WHEREAS:

- The current system, which creates millions of undocumented immigrants living in the shadows of our society, is a threat to our national security, expending countless dollars and human resources tracking down and removing honest workers from our economy—resources that could be spent on true security measures, such as stopping criminals and terrorists from entering the country.¹
- Enforcement-only immigration solutions have been tried and have proven counter-productive, increasing rather than decreasing the number of undocumented immigrants living in the U.S.² Real solutions to our broken immigration system will require comprehensive immigration reform that allows willing workers to come and fill labor needs, reunites immigrant families, and brings the approximately 12 million undocumented immigrants out of the shadows by providing them a path to earned legalization, lawful permanent residency, and eventual citizenship.³
- The U.S. is a nation of immigrants and has been continually reshaped by new groups of people bringing diverse cultures, perspectives, and resources. The overwhelming majority of our people are either immigrants or descended from immigrants. Like most of our ancestors, most immigrants today migrate either due to economic necessity⁴ or to flee persecution.⁵
- Aspects of the U.S. economy depends on the hard work of immigrant families.⁶ They contribute greatly to the economic well-being of our communities. Immigrants pay taxes but often have inadequate access to public services.⁷

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OUR FAITH TRADITIONS SHARE IN COMMON:

- All human beings have value and are part of God's good creation. (Genesis 1:26-31/ Psalm 8/ John 3:16/ II Corinthians 5:16-21/ Galatians 3:28/ Surah 24 An-Nur: 42-45/ Surah 25 Al-Furqan:54)
- All our faith traditions acknowledge the command of God to welcome and show hospitality to the stranger sojourning among us. (Exodus 22:21; 23:9/ Leviticus 19:33-34/ Deuteronomy 10:19/ Matthew 25:35 and context/ Romans 12:13/ Hebrews 13:2/ Surah 17 Al-Isra: 26/ Surah 30 Ar-Rum: 38)

WE RESOLVE AS FOLLOWS:

- To apply the principles of our faith traditions to this important and timely issue.
- To educate ourselves and our communities about the realities of immigrants and immigration, seeking to dispel myths and stereotypes about people who are here as legal immigrants and as undocumented workers.
- To work within our faith communities to improve our own attitudes and actions toward immigrants, offering them a place of welcome and hospitality rather than hostility.
- To speak out against injustices, exploitation, and hostility directed toward immigrants, documented or undocumented.
- To support and work for a comprehensive reform of immigration laws and procedures, rather than partial immigration solutions that do not fully address the problem.

SIGNATURES TO THE AFC STATEMENT ON ON IMMIGRATION

Below are the names and titles of those who have signed onto this AFC Statement. Names are organized by date first and then by last name. Please note that official signatures are on file for each of the names listed.

Date	Name	Title
6/21/07	Imam Raed Awad	Imam, Birmingham Islamic Society
6/21/07	Father Paul Costopoulos	Holy Trinity/ Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Cathedral
6/21/07	Rev. Thomas Evans	Executive Presbyter for Presbytery of Sheppards & Lapsley
6/21/07	Rev. Ricki A. Mason for Bishop	Julian Gordy, SE Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
6/21/07	Rabbi Jonathan Miller	Rabbi, Temple Emanu-El in Birmingham (Reform Judaism)
6/21/07	Rev. John Mobley	Regional Minister, Alabama and Northwest Florida Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
6/21/07	Henry N. Parsley	Bishop, Diocese of Alabama of the Episcopal Church USA
6/21/07	Dr. Nancy Whitt	Birmingham Friends Meeting (Quaker)
12/20/07	Imam A. Hakeem Nabeeh Um'Rani	Imam at Masjidul Qur'an in Birmingham
12/22/07	Ashfaq Taufique	President, Birmingham Islamic Society
12/24/07	Cantor Daniel Gale	Cantor, Temple Beth-El in Birmingham (Conservative Judaism)
1/03/08	William Leggett	Pastor, Unitarian Universalist Church of Birmingham
1/06/08	Albert Manzella	Executive Director of Catholic Social Services of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama

FOOTNOTES TO THE AFC STATEMENT ON IMMIGRATION

¹ Furthermore, “there is no evidence that Al Qaeda or other terrorist organizations are attempting to breach the U.S.-Mexico Border.” (Letter from Mary Ellen McNish, General Secretary of American Friends Service Committee, to 128 political leaders in Washington, DC, July 28, 2006. The letter is not currently available on the AFSC website, but this link goes to their page on immigrants’ rights, which has similar information and much more: <http://www.afsc.org/immigrants-rights/default.htm>.)

“Most of the 9/11 hijackers were here on legal visas. Since 9/11, the myriad of measures targeting immigrants in the name of national security have netted no terrorism prosecutions. In fact, several of these measures could have the opposite effect and actually make us less safe, as targeted communities of immigrants are afraid to come forward with information.” (Justice for Immigrants, www.justiceforimmigrants.org, an immigrant advocacy organization established by the Roman Catholic Church: source cited: Cato Institute: “Don’t Blame Immigrants for Terrorism,” by Daniel Griswold, Assoc. Director of Cato Institute’s Center for Trade Policy Studies, <http://www.cato.org/dailys/10-23-01.html>)

² Between 1986 and 2002, the budget of the Immigration and Naturalization Service increased from \$474 million to \$6.2 billion, and the Border Patrol budget from \$151 million to \$1.6 billion, to wit, respective increases of 13 times and 10 times their 1986 amounts. During the same time period, the number of Border Patrol officers tripled, and the number of total “linewatch hours” spent patrolling the border grew to eight times that of 1986. (Massey, Douglas S. “Backfire at the Border: Why Enforcement without Legalization Cannot Stop Illegal Immigration.” Published by the Center for Trade Policy Studies. Washington, DC: Cato Institute, June 13, 2005, p. 5: <http://www.freetrade.org/node/32>. Douglas S. Massey is a professor of sociology and public affairs at Princeton University and coauthor of *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002.)

Meanwhile, these policies not only failed to reduce the number of undocumented immigrants crossing the border, but it actually backfired, resulting in an increase in that number. The blockading of major crossing areas such as San Diego and El Paso only pushed the migrants to cross in more remote and arid areas in the desert, resulting in a tripling of the number who die attempting entry, but actually decreasing the apprehension rate from an average of 33 percent in the 1970’s and early 1980’s to an average of only 5 percent by 2002. (Massey, op. cit., p. 6) In effect, the tightening of the borders has resulted not in a decrease of inflow across the border, but in an decrease in outflow, so that the immigrants stay in the U.S. rather than going back and forth, because it has become too expensive (to pay the price of border-smuggling services) and too dangerous to return to Mexico. (Massey, op. cit., p. 8)

Ten years have elapsed since the enactment of the entirely and harshly enforcement-only Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996. This Act included immigration enforcement measures like mandatory detention and expanded grounds for deportation. “In the mid-’90s, the government established operations in San Diego, El Paso, and Arizona that increased fencing and border security. Since then, more than 2,500 people have died of dehydration and exhaustion crossing the desert into the U.S. In addition, thousands of immigrants who do make it into the U.S. are treated inhumanely by an increasingly militarized border security system of police, fences, and jails.” (“Compassion, Not Criminalization in Immigration Reform.” Article published by Sojourners magazine on their website: <http://go.sojo.net/campaign/immigration/explanation>. Editor/ Director: Jim Wallis.) “Today, more than 22,000 people are held daily in county jails and detention centers around the country because of that legislation. The 1996 Act divided families by deporting over one million people. Yet millions of immigrants cross our borders each year, working in jobs that American employers eagerly fill. The past decade should be evidence enough that these disruptive measures have not halted immigration, but in fact, have only driven many people further into the shadows.” (McNish, op. cit.)

³ Comprehensive Immigration Reform consists not only of realistic, sensible, and humanitarian border security and enforcement measures but also a significant reduction in the backlog of family-based visa petitions; the availability of immigrant visas for laborers who perform tasks essential to our economy, though considered “unskilled” labor; a process of earned legalization and progression toward eventual citizenship for the millions of undocumented workers already in the United States; a fair and just application of labor laws to all workers, whether immigrant or non-immigrant, documented or undocumented; shutting down the black market of smuggling and fake documents and exploitation; and shutting down the exploitation of immigrants by unscrupulous people who offer them assistance while taking their money, making false immigration promises, and often doing more harm than good to the immigrants they

purportedly serve. (A good outline of the principles of Comprehensive Immigration Reform is available in the National Immigration Reform *Backgrounder*:

<http://www.immigrationforum.org/documents/TheDebate/ImmigrationReform/CIRBackgrounder.pdf>.)

- 4 “One of the primary reasons for immigration is the deterioration of economies in sending countries—those from which people emigrate. Ironically, many of the free trade policies promoted by the United States indirectly result in immigration to the U.S. In many sending countries, small farmers cannot compete in a marketplace increasingly dominated by large agribusinesses. In Mexico, a million small farmers have lost their farms as a result of being unable to sell the corn and grain they grew in an increasingly unfair market. This loss of farmland is tied to the subsidies farmers and agribusinesses receive in the U.S.: because farms in the U.S. receive government subsidies, they can afford to sell their product at a much lower price than small farmers in developing countries, where governments cannot or do not offer subsidies. At the same time, many small businesses in Mexico have had to close when large-scale U.S. corporations arrived; the local small businesses could not compete with large-scale U.S. industries. Thus, many Mexican farmers and laborers have had little choice but to migrate looking for work.” (*Sojourners* web article cited above)
- 5 “Some people who arrive in the United States are refugees. Refugees may be fleeing violence inflicted by their own government or civil war in their home country. Also, many refugees flee because they are not adequately protected by the laws of their home country.” (*Ibid.*)
- 6 Our immigration system does not currently allow for a sufficient number of legal immigrants per year to meet the demands of our economy and its labor needs. Moreover, the current severe backlog in family-based immigration petitions is detrimental to the unity and well-being of families with members on both sides of the border.
- 7 “A common misconception exists that immigrants use up national resources. However, immigrants actually contribute \$1,800 more on average in annual taxes than they receive in benefits, according to a 1997 study by the National Academy of Sciences. Immigrants pay local taxes through work, purchases, and housing, as well as direct federal taxes. Young immigrant workers contribute to Social Security through payroll taxes.” (*Ibid.*) In fact, according to the Social Security Administration, through a spokesperson quoted in Bart Jones, *Newsday*, February 20, 2006: between 1990 and 1998, \$20 billion dollars were paid into a “suspense file” where social security numbers do not match up with workers’ names—to wit, paid by undocumented workers, who are paying into the system but will not be able to collect benefits. In 2003 alone, \$7.1 billion was paid into this suspense file.

Moreover, “the net benefit of immigration to the U.S. is nearly \$10 billion annually. As Alan Greenspan points out, 70% of immigrants arrive in prime working age. That means we haven’t spent a penny on their education, yet they are transplanted into our workforce and will contribute \$500 billion toward our social security system over the next 20 years.” (Justice for Immigrants: cites sources as: Andrew Sum, Mykhaylo Trubskyy, Ishwar Khatiwada, et al., “Immigrant Workers in the New England Labor Market: Implications for Workforce Policy,” Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, Boston. Prepared for the New England Regional Office, the Employment and Training Administration, and the U.S. Department of Labor, Boston, Massachusetts, October, 2002.

<http://www.nupr.neu.edu/1102/immigration.PDF#search='center%20for%20labor%20market%20studies%20at%20Northeastern%20University%20studies'>)

SOURCES FOR FURTHER READING AND RESEARCH ON IMMIGRATION

Hernandez, Juan. *The New American Pioneers: Why Are We Afraid of Mexican Immigrants?* Lanham, Maryland: Pneuma Life Publishing, 2006.

Massey, Douglas S., Ph.D. "Five Myths About Immigration: Common Misconceptions Underlying U.S. Border-Enforcement Policy." *Immigration Policy In Focus*, Volume 4, Issue 6, August 2005, Washington, DC: American Immigration Law Foundation, 2005. This publication, along with several other good publications, is available at www.immigrationpolicy.org. http://www.aifl.org/ipc/infocus/2005_fivemyths.pdf.

Massey, Douglas S., Jorge Durand, and Nolan J. Malone. *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002.

Other helpful websites with information on immigration issues and the need for comprehensive immigration reform:

American Immigration Lawyers Association: <http://www.aila.org/content/default.aspx?docid=1019> and <http://www.aila.org/content/default.aspx?docid=12142> (Also has links to several informative articles on these issues.)

Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.: <http://www.cliniclegal.org> (Click on "Advocacy Topics" tab for issues statements, or click on "Training" tab to explore excellent training opportunities to equip non-profit organizations and for offering immigration assistance legal services.)

Immigration Law Center on the Internet: <http://www.visaus.com>

National Immigration Forum: <http://www.immigrationforum.org/> (Has links to many excellent and informative articles and documents on immigrants, immigration, and immigration reform written by authorities in the field)

Siskind & Susser Immigration Law Website: <http://www.visalaw.com> (Has many information resources as compiled by a very seasoned immigration law firm, including the basics of immigration law and ongoing updates regarding immigration laws.)

Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition: <http://www.tnimmigrant.org>

More websites from organizations providing information and faith perspectives on immigration reform:

American Friends Service Committee: www.afsc.org/immigrants-rights/learn/default.htm

Latin America Working Group: www.lawg.org

Mennonite Central Committee Washington Office: www.mcc.org/us/washington

National Council of La Raza: www.nclr.org

New American Opportunity Campaign: www.cirnow.org

No More Deaths Campaign: www.nomoredeaths.org

Sojourners: Faith, Politics, Culture: <http://go.sojo.net/campaign/immigration/explanation>

Southern Poverty Law Center: www.splcenter.org

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops: www.usccb.org/mrs/stranger.shtml

World Relief: <http://www.wr.org/gettinginvolved/advocacy/view.asp?id=80024022>

Studies on U.S. Immigration:

National Academy of Sciences: <http://fermat.nap.edu/catalog/5779.html>

Join the Immigrant Justice Action Network:

<http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org/>

<http://www.justiciaparalosisinmigrantes.org/>