

A Statement on Just and Humane Immigration Reform

Adopted by the Alliance of Baptists
Convocation, July 31, 2010

Background:

One of the advantages of our being a member body of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA and Church World Service, is being able to partner with other faith groups on statements and resolutions advocating for peace, justice and equity such as their recent statements to promote just and human immigration reform in the 111th U.S. Congress. The Alliance support of such immigration reform is consistent with the Alliance Covenant and Mission, which states:

In a time when historic Baptist principles, freedoms, and traditions need a clear voice, and in our personal and corporate response to the call of God in Jesus Christ to be disciples and servants in the world, we commit ourselves to ... the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ and the calling of God to all peoples to repentance and faith, reconciliation and hope, social and economic justice....

To keep faith with our Covenant ... we side with those who are poor (and) pursue justice with and for those who are oppressed.

As congregations and individuals within the Alliance witness the consequences of our current flawed immigration system, we are compelled to stand in solidarity with those impacted by our nation's policies. The current U.S. immigration process separates family members, many who have waited decades to be reunited, and hurts productivity as those wishing to work in this country, also endure lengthy backlogs.

Such a system leaves many realizing feeding their children necessitates crossing the border illegally. Reaching a point of desperation, many risk their lives to cross the desert, where hundreds of them die every year. Thousands of immigrants have been arrested in mass raids and hundreds of thousands have been detained or deported, with little or no access to legal counsel. Children have been detained in detention centers lacking proper educational or religious services, and at least 83 people have died in such facilities due to inadequate medical treatment.

Such enforcement measures leave children without parents, families separated without knowledge of loved ones' whereabouts, and those who arrived as infants deported to countries they never called home. Many immigrants who endure detention and deportation are lawful permanent residents; many seek asylum from persecution; and still others simply seek the better life the United States promises.

When these issues are discussed, too often much of the public discussion blames immigrants for the nation's problems, rather than uniting to enact policies that are beneficial to all persons. Anti-immigrant sentiment has become such an accepted norm throughout the United States that some local laws bar immigrants from receiving social services and deny funding to charitable organizations that do not check immigration status prior to administering services. Local police act as immigration officials, resulting in racial profiling and a widespread fear of reporting crimes, which compromises community safety, yet law enforcement turns a blind eye to employer exploitation of immigrants. The public discussion needs to be enriched and informed by the voice of the prophetic religious community.

Furthermore, these issues stem from underlying, global causes of migration, such as war, environmental exhaustion, poverty, and inequitable trade and development policies that are often ignored. This presents us with a noble challenge: to work together to address the underlying global causes of migration at the same time we improve the ways we answer the knock at our church doors. We know that root causes of migration include global poverty and unjust practices of international monetary organizations. The Jubilee Act (HR 4405) would broaden and deepen debt cancellation, allowing countries to invest more in education, health care, and public infrastructure, thus reducing the number of people forced to seek economic opportunities away from their

As we consider the causes and realities of human migration, we together affirm these convictions concerning God's creation and commandment to love one another:

- 1) God created human beings in God's image, and as such each person is a precious and sacred reflection of the Creator.
- 2) God's people are a pilgrim people. Throughout Biblical history, the people of God have been sojourners, refugees, and migrants. God protected them as they moved, multiplied, and maintained the earth. The Bible teaches us to defend, protect, and honor the rights and humanity of the sojourner, stranger, refugee, and immigrant. God calls us to welcome the stranger.
- 3) Jesus calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves and Jesus also said that people of faith will be judged on the way we treat foreigners in our midst.

Today -- as in all other times-- the Church is called to rise in unequivocal defense of the stranger, the sojourner, the widow and orphan, and our most vulnerable neighbors

As we seek to love our neighbors and welcome the stranger, we also seek laws that are humane and just. In light of the highest political ideals grounded in justice, equality and freedom, our nation's official treatment of immigrants continues to be a grave affront to the mandates of Christian faith, which does not abide bad treatment of the stranger, the visitor, or those who seek asylum from persecution. Our faith-inspired legacy calls us to reexamine our immigration policies and services in light of the current situation, and to work for swift federal reform that is humane, just and sustainable.

Because of our commitment to God's justice, we -- the Alliance of Baptists -- join other faith leaders and communities in calling on the 111th and the 112th U.S. Congress to pass just, humane, equitable and comprehensive immigration reform that:

- **Allows undocumented immigrants and their families to earn lawful permanent residency upon the satisfaction of reasonable criteria and eventually pursue citizenship;**
- **Expands legal avenues of entry for families who are separated and for those who seek work;**
- **Aligns border policies and internal enforcement policies with humanitarian values and due process protections**

We pledge to raise our voices in advocacy for immigrants, refugees and other displaced peoples by supporting legislation that provides just, human, equitable and compressive immigration reform in meetings, letters and other communications with our congressional representatives and senators.

We call on our Alliance of Baptists Congregations to:

- **Lead in prayer, teaching, and preaching about the biblical, spiritual and moral basis for compassionate hospitality toward immigrants.**
- **Pray, study and search our hearts and minds with respect to our own attitudes and preconceptions regarding immigrant peoples, and, to provide opportunities in our churches for us to hear the stories of our immigrant sisters and brothers whether they come to us with our without official documents.**
- **Join with other faith leaders and communities in calling on the 111th and 112th U.S. Congress to enact the Jubilee Act which would expand debt cancellation and provide a framework for responsible lending to poor countries.**

(With thanks to National Council of Churches of Christ, USA, Church World Service and Ecumenical Advocay Days for educational materials and advocacy information on the need for comprehensive immigration reform. See www.ncccusa.org; www.churchworldservice.org; www.advocacydays.org)