



Issue Brief: Comprehensive Immigration Reform

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT THE ASSOCIATION'S

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Introduction: Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Driven by the prospect of economic opportunity and U.S. businesses' voracious need for cheap labor, undocumented immigration is on the rise. Approximately 12 million undocumented people live and work in the United States, trapped by a broken immigration system which creates an under-class of residents who are refused the dignity and civil protections that come with citizenship. Our current immigration system keeps families apart, both through a huge backlog in family-based immigration, as well as through the unjust detention and deportation of immigrant mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters. We call for an immediate stop to federal raids that separate parents from their children and create a climate of fear and repression. We recognize that racism has blinded many Americans to what takes place in our own kitchens, workshops, and fields. For our nation to be whole, we must acknowledge that our lives of privilege are supported in thousands of ways by people whose labor is invisible and whose suffering is hidden.

We call upon our elected officials to enact legislation that includes or affirms the following:

- The creation of an accessible and timely process for individuals in this country to obtain residency and citizenship;
- Reforms in our family-based immigration system to significantly reduce waiting times for separated families who currently wait many years to be reunited;
- Equitable treatment of all workers: the creation of legal avenues for workers and their families who wish to migrate to the U.S. to enter our country and work in a safe, legal, and orderly manner with their rights fully protected;
- The right of non-citizens to due process, legal representation, and presumption of innocence;
- Safety of asylum seekers and an opportunity to prove they deserve asylum;
- Border protection policies that treat all individuals with respect, are consistent with humanitarian values, and allow authorities to identify and prevent entry of actual terrorists and dangerous criminals.

Unitarian Universalism and Immigration

Our Unitarian Universalist faith calls us to recognize that no one is "the stranger," to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and to support the use of justice, equity, and compassion in human relations. Many among us are immigrants and integral members of, and contributors to, our communities and our congregations; many of us witness the deleterious impact of the current unjust immigration system on the families and communities around us.

The Unitarian Universalist Association has supported fair and compassionate immigration practices since its inception: at our first General Assembly in 1961, we passed a resolution on the rights of immigrant workers. A 1963 resolution called for immigration reform, and subsequent UUA statements supported the humane treatment of immigrants. Recent UUA statements, including the 2004 statement on Civil Liberties, affirm our strong commitment to advocate for the right to due process of immigrants, refugees and foreign nationals. In 2006, the General Assembly passed an *Action of Immediate Witness to Support Immigrant Justice*, calling Unitarian Universalists to join people of many faith traditions in supporting the rights of our brothers and sisters who are recent immigrants to the United States of America. [Most recently, at the 2007 General Assembly, delegates passed an Action of Immediate Witness to Support Immigrant Families—Stop the ICE \(Immigration and Customs Enforcement\) Raids that calls for an immediate moratorium of all inhumane raids and resulting deportations.](#)

Take action: Contact your Senators and Representative!

Fax a letter or call your representatives; ask them to **support truly comprehensive immigration reform**. You can look up your Representative's and Senators' phone numbers online at www.senate.gov and www.house.gov, or call the Capitol Switchboard at: (202) 224-312. Ask to speak to the staff person working on immigration; identify yourself as a constituent and a person of faith, let the staff person know you support comprehensive immigration reform and **ask** if the Representative will do so. **Please note: Currently, there is not a bill on comprehensive immigration reform in either the House or the Senate. But it is still important for representatives to hear that constituents support the rights of immigrants and fair and compassionate immigration practices.**

Talking Points on Comprehensive Immigration Reform

- The federal government must act now to address a broken immigration system which causes suffering in the lives of millions of people in the United States
- Comprehensive immigration reform is the most effective and humane approach, and includes:
 - An earned path to legal permanent residence and eventual citizenship for undocumented immigrants who fulfill reasonable criteria,
 - Effective and humane border enforcement,
 - Wider legal channels for immigrants to work in the U.S. with their rights fully protected,
 - Enhancements to the family-based immigration system so that families are not unduly separated from their loved ones.

Further Resources

- **Coalition for Comprehensive Immigration Reform:** This legislative campaign for comprehensive immigration reform has extensive analysis of and up-to-date information on immigration reform legislation: www.cirnnow.org
- ***For You Were Once a Stranger: Immigration in the U.S. Through the Lens of Faith*** is a comprehensive immigration toolkit developed by Interfaith Worker Justice that helps people of faith reflect on what their religious traditions say about immigrations and engage in meaningful action for creating a just and humane immigration program: <http://www.iwj.org>
- **Rights Working Group:** This national coalition of more than 250 community-based groups and policy organizations is "dedicated to ensuring that American commitment to liberty and justice is fulfilled;" RWG's website includes in-depth information on immigration legislation: www.rightsworkinggroup.org
- **Breakthrough TV:** Immigration reform is one priority of this international human rights and media organization. Their guide: *Restoring the Right to Due Process: A Toolkit for Immigrant Rights Advocates* is available at <http://www.breakthrough.tv/>
- **The New Sanctuary Movement:** This interfaith coalition of congregations pledges to open their congregations' doors and hearts to immigrant workers and their families on the brink of deportation. Contact Susan Leslie (sleslie@uua.org) for information on UU participation in this movement, (see <http://www.uua.org/news/newssubmissions/24058.shtml>) and visit www.newsanctuarymovement.org to learn more.

For more information on UUA work on comprehensive immigration reform legislation, visit www.uua.org/socialjustice, or contact Lisa Swanson in the UUA Washington Office at: lswanson@uua.org or (202) 296-4672 x 22

For more information on UU participation in the New Sanctuary Movement, please contact Susan Leslie in the UUA Office of Congregational Advocacy and Witness: sleslie@uua.org or (617) 948-4607