

## **Resolution On Immigration Reform in the United States**

Adopted at RRA Annual Meeting March 12, 2013

### Background Information

Do not oppress the stranger; you know the soul of the stranger, for you were slaves in the land of Egypt. (Exodus 23:9)

You shall not wrong or oppress a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan. If you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me . . . . (Exodus 22:21-4)

My father was a fugitive Aramean . . . (Deut. 26:5)

When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love her as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the Lord am your God. (Leviticus, 19:33-34)

More often than any other mitzvah in the Torah, we are commanded to champion the needs of the vulnerable in society, including the “stranger,” the immigrant, and the foreigner, for we know deep in our collective being what it is to be the persecuted minority, the outsider subject to prejudice and oppression.

As Jews our myth and history is steeped in immigration: Abraham leaving his homeland, Jacob and all his offspring immigrating to Egypt, the Exodus, the settling of Israel, the multiple exiles, two thousand years of being expelled from one country after another, even in our own generation millions of Jews emigrating from the Soviet Union. The story of the immigrant, the stranger, the “other,” is our own story. As Jews, we ought to do nothing less than champion the needs of the immigrants in our midst with the full force of our spiritual and political power.

There are over 11 million undocumented immigrants in the U. S. today. The current immigration system fails more than just immigrant communities, or families torn apart by visa backlogs, or undocumented students. It fails all communities, all families and all children who embrace diversity and equal access to the American dream.

The family is the basic unit of our society, and immigrants who have the support of strong families are more likely to contribute to society, pay taxes, and start businesses that create jobs. But our broken immigration system divides families and keeps loved ones apart for years and even decades, which discourages them from following the rules and working within the system. Current immigration policy also refuses to recognize same sex families.

Millions of workers — one in twenty in the U.S. workforce — are undocumented workers who are vulnerable to employers who seek unfair advantage over their competitors by not paying workers minimum wage or by ignoring labor rights protected by law. Unscrupulous employers

are able to pit one group of workers against another, driving down wages for all Americans. Undocumented workers have no recourse to legal protection.

The unreliable and obsolete immigration system makes planning for the future more difficult for business. Industries like agriculture that require a large workforce ready, willing, and able to work long and physically demanding days have been unable to plan their business strategies around a stable workforce.

The immigration system we have today is harmful to America's security. With few effective legal options to immigrate to the US and to become a citizen, many seek ways to go around the system. This broken system has spawned a thriving market for smugglers and has generated chaos on U.S. borders. A seemingly random enforcement regime targets ordinary immigrant workers and families, diverting resources away from protecting against genuine threats.

In the absence of comprehensive immigration reform, states have passed laws that compel local law enforcement to act as immigration enforcement agents. These statutes deter undocumented immigrants (and citizens or in-status immigrants who have family members who are undocumented) not only from calling the police when they become the victims of crime, but also from coming forward as witnesses to crimes committed against others. And those Hispanics or Latinos who are citizens or in-status fear unjustified stops or arrests resulting from biased policing. When immigrant communities fear local law enforcement rather than trust them, society in general becomes less safe.

The anti-immigrant movement often does not distinguish between undocumented immigrants and minority communities, making sweeping statements about Latinos and other minority groups. This anti-immigrant rhetoric puts minority communities at risk. The Anti-Defamation League has shown that extremist forces in our society today capitalize on the immigration debate to advance their agenda of hate and bigotry. White supremacists have exploited the issue of immigration to promote their racist views.

There are tens of thousands of undocumented students who have been raised and educated in the United States who are not eligible for citizenship, college loans or in-state tuition at public colleges and universities.

Therefore, be it resolved that the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association supports legislation that will:

- Include earned legalization with a path to citizenship for unauthorized immigrants already living in the United States;
- Reject any measure that would create a permanent underclass of Americans by denying immigrants a path to real citizenship.
- End immigration enforcement responsibilities for local law enforcement;
- Allow Americans to sponsor same-sex permanent partners for legal residency in the United States, and to extend to same-sex couples the same rights afforded to all other families;
- Create a fair system to deal with the future flow of immigrants;

- Provide access to college loans and in-state tuition for undocumented students who were educated in U.S. schools;
  - Enforce border protection policies that enhance our national security; and
  - Recognize and honor the social and economic contributions made by immigrant workers and protect them from exploitation.
- Provide political asylum to LGBTQ people persecuted in their countries of origin.

Be it further resolved that the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association urges rabbis to:

- Raise awareness in congregations, communities, campuses, schools and organizations of the importance of immigration reform;
- Support immigrant groups and their allies who are advocating for immigration reform;
- Use Passover as a time to teach about Jewish values about immigrants;
- Set up meetings with Members of Congress who will be on recess March 22-April 8 ;
- Send and/or recruit others to send letters to the editor or opinion pieces into Jewish media connecting Passover to immigration;
- Distribute Haggadah inserts/supplement (a list of existing ones and many other resources are on the [We Were Strangers Too website](#))

Be it further resolved that the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association shall work with the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, the Tikkun Olam Commission and congregations in the national campaign for immigration reform.

Be it further resolved that this resolution will be distributed to the media and to organizations working for comprehensive immigration reform. This resolution should also be publicized throughout the Reconstructionist movement.

Be it further resolved that the RRA empowers the RRA Executive Director and members of the RRA Board to speak out publicly on its behalf on this issue, and encourages them to do so.