



# **WORLD RELIEF**

**Tuesday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007 at 2:00pm  
2237 Rayburn House Office Building  
House of Representatives  
Committee on the Judiciary**

**Testimony before the Subcommittee on Immigration,  
Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security, and International Law**

**Hearing on Comprehensive Immigration Reform:  
Perspectives from Faith-Based and Immigrant Communities**

**By:  
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Thank you Chairman Lofgren, Ranking Member King, and the members of the House Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security, and International Law for providing me with the opportunity to testify before you on an Evangelical perspective on Comprehensive Immigration Reform. This is indeed a tough issue that requires good thought, frank discussion, and honest solutions, and I thank the Committee for tackling the issue of immigration reform from all angles, including the faith-based angle.

As the Director of Refugee and Immigration Programs for World Relief, I am responsible for the technical support for a network of 24 offices that have programs to serve refugees, trafficking victims, and immigrants. As the humanitarian arm of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), we have worked with Evangelical churches over the past 60 years to relieve human suffering, poverty and hunger worldwide in the name of Jesus Christ. The NAE is made up of 53 member denominations, representing 45,000 churches in the United States. World Relief's mission is to work with the poorest of the poor- and in the U.S. with foreign born populations including refugees and immigrants. World Relief has worked for over 60 years with local churches to create sustainable

solutions that help the desperately poor in more than 30 countries. We feel it is a part of our Biblical mandate to reach out to those in need, our neighbors, and our communities. World Relief's programs include disaster relief, refugee assistance, immigrant assistance, trafficking victim protection, AIDS ministries, child survival and development, agricultural development, and micro-enterprise development.

Through our work with immigrants, we have seen the consequences of a broken system that has separated families for many years. We are compelled to speak from our experience by engaging the Evangelical community on the issue of immigration reform. Through our work with churches, we have seen the immigrant church as the fastest growing church in the Evangelical community. The issues of immigration policy and immigrants in our communities will always be with us, and Evangelicals must think carefully about their response to the trends and changes brought about by immigration. In this debate on Comprehensive Immigration Reform, we have heard concerns from church leaders and members about the need to secure our borders and stop illegal immigration but also the call to show compassion to the stranger in our midst. We as Evangelicals must look to the Bible as a guide for examining this issue closely and how we as Evangelicals should respond, through the lens of Scripture, to immigrants and immigration policy.

### **The Biblical Reality and God's Love for the Foreigner**

God loves the stranger and foreigner, and equates our relationship with Him as strangers and aliens apart from the work of Christ. The Bible commands us to welcome the stranger. Modern reality also requires us to embrace the immigrant population, many of whom are our brothers and sisters in Christ, and a growing force in the church. Through immigration, God is bringing citizens of many closed and un-reached countries into contact with American Christians. We as Evangelicals therefore welcome the opportunity to share our faith with people who might otherwise have no opportunity to hear the Good News. The immigrant Evangelical church is growing rapidly in the U.S. and around the world. Among Evangelicals in the United States, "the fastest growing are found among the Independent immigrant churches. . . . In 20 years, African, Asian, and Latin American Evangelicals . . . will likely be at the forefront of . . . global movements as well as their manifestations in the USA."<sup>1</sup>

In the Bible, God repeatedly calls us to show love and compassion to "aliens," or immigrants. In Deuteronomy 10:18 – 19,<sup>2</sup> we are told that "[God] defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt." God also reminds us throughout the Old and New Testament that we ourselves, as Christians, are aliens on this Earth, not only physically in this world-which is not our home, but also spiritually estranged from God until Christ's sacrifice. Leviticus 19:33-34 teaches us that, "[w]hen an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Todd M. Johnson, Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, "USA Evangelicals/evangelicals in Global Context: Trends and Statistics."

<sup>2</sup> All Scripture references are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version.

aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.” Thus, we as Christians are called to identify with the plight of the stranger amongst us for we ourselves were once aliens in Egypt.

Love also in the Christian tradition requires specific acts of care and respect. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus answers the question of “who is my neighbor?” with the parable of the Good Samaritan. (Luke 10:29-37) Part of what makes the Good Samaritan parable so compelling is that the Samaritan, who was a stranger or alien himself, was the one who stopped to help the Jewish man. This and other parables remind us that “we are all aliens sent out to help other aliens find a place of safety in this world.”<sup>3</sup> God does not distinguish among arbitrary divisions such as country of origin. Instead, God desires to include all people in His Kingdom, for “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)

The Bible shows us that God moves people for a reason and migration is often reflective of His overall purpose for mankind. Mark 17:26 states that “From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.” For example, God called Abraham from Ur, called the Israelites out of Egypt and into the Promised Land, and even moved Jesus’ family from Bethlehem, then to Egypt and Nazareth. We must couch our current discussion of immigration reform within the fuller understanding of God’s purposes through the movement of people and the history of migration throughout the Bible and into current times.

### **Support for Comprehensive Immigration Reform**

As Congress continues debate on immigration reform, there will be specific policy prescriptions offered in various legislative proposals that will make us continuously reflect on our Biblical principles. As an Evangelical organization committed to the rule of law but also to acting compassionately to those in our midst, we call for legislation to include the following specific principles:

- Reforms in our family-based immigration system to significantly reduce waiting times for separated families who currently wait many years to be reunited;
- The creation of more responsive 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 that prevents their exploitation and assures them due process;
- The option for those individuals and families who are already living in the U.S. and working hard, to apply for permanent legal status and citizenship if they choose to do so, by meeting specific restitution and application criteria; and
- Border protection policies that are consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect, while allowing the authorities to carry out the critical task of enforcing our laws.

World Relief believes that a comprehensive approach to immigration reform is required—one that addresses the root causes of why immigrants come to the U.S. in the first place

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<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Robert Nelson, Remarks for The American Bar Association’s, “Fortress America: The State and Future of U.S. Immigration Law and Policy,” held at the National Press Club, January 26, 2006.

and addresses the complex and outmoded immigration system that currently exists. For example, current law has created numerous barriers for legitimate refugees abroad and seekers of asylum in the U.S. to receive the protection they deserve. Additionally, approximately eleven million “undocumented” immigrants currently live in the United States,<sup>4</sup> and more than three million U.S. citizen children live in families headed by an undocumented immigrant.<sup>5</sup> An “undocumented” individual does not have permission to work or live in the U.S.

Many undocumented children are raised here but are unable to attend college or work legally. Individuals are risking their lives and literally dying to come to the United States. Families face inhumane waits of up to twenty years to reunify with family members. There are an inadequate number of visas for employers to hire the foreign workers necessary for jobs that they cannot find native-born Americans to fill. We have a growing black market characterized by widespread use of false documents, increasingly violent smuggling cartels, and exploitation of undocumented workers.

### **The Issue of Legality and the Penalty for Breaking the Law**

Evangelicals recognize that, “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.” (Romans 13:1) Therefore we support the importance of following and enforcing laws, while simultaneously recognizing that laws were created for the well-being of human beings and society. Ultimately the laws must answer to God’s higher law, which requires us to treat all human life with sanctity. All persons bear the image of Christ and thus should be treated with the dignity and respect that we would afford our Savior. Valuing persons includes doing what we can to preserve them, to care for them, and to create fair systems that lead to healthy societies.<sup>6</sup> We must from time to time ask if our human-made laws create a just and better existence for those who are created in God's image.

We do not condone any violations of the law, such as living in the United States illegally, but we recognize that our complex and inadequate immigration system has made it nearly impossible for many of the hard-working people that our country needs, to enter or remain in the country legally and/or reunite with family members.

Despite the difficult immigration system, adherence to the rule of law is a non-negotiable, and as we consider immigration reform, we can look to the Bible to help inform our decisions about justice, restitution, redemption, restoration and integration into our communities. Immigrants are often hard-working, God-fearing individuals and if provided the opportunity, would want to admit wrong-doing and come out of the shadows as law-abiding, contributing members of our society. They should be provided an opportunity to admit their wrong-doing of maintaining undocumented presence in the U.S. but the punishment must be in line with the offense, and it must be recognized that

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<sup>4</sup> <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/44.pdf>, stating that as of March 2005, there were nearly 11 million undocumented individuals in the U.S.

<sup>5</sup> <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/46.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Evangelical Project for Public Engagement. National Association of Evangelicals, For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility, 8, 10 (2004).

not all offenses are one and the same. Our legal system has always recognized that the punitive and corrective measures must coincide with the crime committed. The Biblical concept of restoration into full fellowship is something we must consider in this debate as we seek to integrate those who are here as undocumented individuals into our communities. We feel they share our values of family and hard work and are willing to become productive, law-abiding members of our society if given the opportunity.

The issue for many undocumented immigrants is that there is no restorative measure to address the infraction of entering illegally or overstaying a visa. Unfortunately the term illegal is often used to justify the marginalization of the immigrant population. Such practice only compounds the problem and does not resolve it. The two ways to resolve this issue are to deport everyone here illegally, or create an immigration system with restitution and a path to legal status or citizenship. World Relief supports an opportunity for those who are law-abiding, hard-working immigrants to come out of the shadows and admit they broke the law, and start on the process of restitution whereby they can become fully integrated members of our society.

We must also address the issue of the word amnesty and its use in recent debate. Amnesty as defined in the dictionary is defined as “the act of an authority (as a government) by which pardon is granted to a large group of individuals.”<sup>7</sup> The word amnesty is often used by those opposing Comprehensive Immigration Reform because they believe that providing a path to earned legalization would be giving a blanket pardon to those who broke immigration law to be here illegally. We must strongly reiterate that providing earned legalization is not a blanket pardon as immigrants would have to pay a penalty in addition to proving that they can be law-abiding and productive members of our society. The current debate surrounding immigration and the various legislative proposals being discussed do not in any way condone breaking of the law or provide a blanket pardon without some redress for the wrong that was committed by being here illegally. There are appropriate penalties for the crimes committed and the penalty must match the offense. Many immigrants do not currently have a means by which to receive lawful status in the United States, and they go undetected by living in the shadows. If they could apply for current lawful status, they would be much more likely to come forward, and the government could better target the small number of potential criminals and terrorists. World Relief has also encountered a catch-22 situation with individuals who entered the U.S. without inspection but who would now qualify for lawful permanent residence status. Under current law, they must return to their home country to be interviewed, but are often unwilling to do so because they face the 3 and 10 year bars to re-entry due to unlawful presence in the U.S. for more than 6 and 12 months respectively. Fixing some of these barriers would allow many individuals to move forward in the process of obtaining legal status.

### **Caring for the Stranger**

We often hear the concern that immigrants do not share American values and are adding to the “moral decay” of our country. As an organization that has worked in serving the immigrant population over the past 25 years, I strongly object to this thinking because the

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<sup>7</sup> Definition from Merriam-Webster OnLine, <http://www.m-w.com/>.

vast majority of immigrants are hard-working, family-loving and willing to learn English and integrate into our communities. Rather than saying that immigrants do not share our American values, we must then teach them our American values, and churches must play an integral role in this.

The issue of immigration tends to play on our worst fears, because it confronts our sense of personal and national identity and because it alters our expectations concerning economic prosperity and security. We can choose to respond in fear, and let the instincts of “fight or flight” take over, or we can remind ourselves, as God’s people, of our true identity in Him. We can see the case of Egypt in Genesis, when Joseph was welcomed by the Egyptian Pharaoh but later on in Exodus, the Egyptians felt threatened by their foreigners which resulted in the enslavement and eventual mass exodus of the Israelites out of Egypt. While we need to address the realities of the impact of immigration on our economy and communities, we must do so in a way that is not held captive to fear, because we are first and foremost citizens of God’s kingdom. 1 John 4:18 states: “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear...” To create a society of fear is to create an unstable and broken society. As Franklin D. Roosevelt famously said in his first inaugural address to the nation in the midst of the Great Depression, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

God offers abundant grace to everyone and demonstrates this mostly clearly on the Cross. As the Body of Christ, our purpose is to imitate Him, by showing compassion and justice to everyone regardless of their individual situation and by investing in and valuing their lives. Grace motivates God’s people towards works of sacrificial compassion and justice. Just as God’s work of grace requires Christ’s sacrifice, so we are called to make sacrifices, both individually and corporately, in our lives for the sake of others. The power of God’s grace blurs the human distinction between giver and recipient, between neighbor and stranger, which in turn creates opportunities for unexpected mutual blessing as we realize that our material possession do not really belong to us. We are moved to show compassion to all people, regardless of ethnic and cultural boundaries, as our identity is rooted in Christ.

The pursuit of prosperity has been a powerful force in guiding migration throughout American history. In assessing public opinion towards immigrants, polls almost exclusively deal with immigration within an economic context: do immigrants help or hurt the economy, rather than seeking to uncover the cultural and personal contributions that immigrants make to our society? Do we only value immigrants who contribute to our nation’s wealth? God does not measure our value based upon what we have to offer or contribute to an earthly economy. As God’s people, we must resist the temptation to measure others’ value to our society on the basis of their contribution to our affluence. In the Biblical example of Ruth and Boaz, we see that Boaz married Ruth despite what many thought would be a marriage that would be a burden and detriment to Boaz’s personal wealth and affluence. However, because of Boaz’s compassion on Ruth, we see he was able to play an instrumental role in the lives of those in the genealogical line of David and Jesus, and participated in God’s plan for the world by not shunning immigrants as threats to his prosperity.

### **The Issue of Security**

In light of recent terrorist activities aimed at the U.S., it is imperative that our government try everything possible to secure the well being of its citizens. However, allowing 10-12 million immigrants to remain in the country without a system to identify them, does nothing to assure us of our security. In fact by not addressing the undocumented population, many would indeed call the current situation as “de facto” amnesty.

In order to address the issue of immigration in a way that would add to our national security, our government must recognize two things about the current situation: First, we can assume that immigrants must not pose a significant security threat to the US or else we would be doing far more to address this current security dilemma than we are currently doing. Second, the legalization of this immigrant population would serve our security concerns because it would allow U.S. immigration enforcement officials to focus on those who may have intentions to harm our country.

As a measure of security, the creation of walls should only be considered as a last resort. The impacts of walls are detrimental to those who are living on both sides of the wall and have been purported by many to actually increase the number of undocumented in our country by preventing people from returning to their country of origin if they so desire. The United States has been a historic champion of bringing down such walls, and to now be a proponent of walls sends the wrong message to the world and does more to divide neighbors rather than resolve our current immigration problem. Building walls without creating legal avenues to address the reasons why they cross the border in the first place would only perpetuate the illegal immigration problem.

### **The Issue of Family**

From Genesis onward, the Bible tells us that the family is central to God’s vision for human society. God has revealed himself to us in the language of family, adopting us as His children (Rom. 8:23, Gal. 4:5) and teaching us by the Holy Spirit to call him *Abba Father* (Rom. 8:15, Gal. 4:6).<sup>8</sup>

Government does not have the primary responsibility for guaranteeing wholesome family life. That is the job of families themselves and of other institutions, especially churches. But governments should understand that people are more than autonomous individuals; they live in families and many are married. While providing individuals with ways to remedy or escape abusive relationships, governments should promote laws and policies that strengthen the well-being of families.<sup>9</sup>

Families are the building blocks of an ordered and procreative society through which people are able to grow and experience the love of God. That value has been reflected in our immigration system which allows U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents to

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<sup>8</sup> Evangelical Project for Public Engagement. National Association of Evangelicals, For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility, 14 (2004).

<sup>9</sup> Evangelical Project for Public Engagement. National Association of Evangelicals, For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility, 14 (2004).

apply for certain relatives to immigrate to the U.S. Indeed, our country has been built on the backs of immigrant families and our American history is the story of the importance of family to the immigrant experience. Immigrants often rely on their family members to help create family businesses and family members are able to care for one another when here together. They are often able to give back to the community more as a family unit than they would as individuals as they work and live together to care for sick relatives, watch children, and provide each other with moral support and encouragement. We must continue to place priority on reunifying families as quickly as possible through immigration reform. The current backlog in which family members are separated for long periods of time creates undue hardship for the immigrants who are trying to work hard and contribute to their communities. By allowing immigrant families to be more quickly reunited, we allow for more stable and stronger communities. Immigration through family has been the cornerstone of our immigration system through the decades and we must continue to value and strengthen that which has made our country so great.

The issue of chain migration must also be addressed as we consider reforms in our family-immigration based system. Chain migration is a myth. This concept purports that immigrants sponsor an uncontrollable number of family members. In reality, only immigrants who have already gained legal permanent residency or U.S. citizenship can sponsor relatives for permanent residence. On average, they only sponsor an average of 1.2 family members.<sup>10</sup> Since there are already highly restrictive caps on family reunification visas, and all admitted family members must qualify under one of the categories approved by Congress, there is no opportunity for “chain migration” to occur. Only children, spouses, parents, and siblings qualify for such sponsorship – cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and other extended family members cannot come to the United States through the family system.<sup>11</sup> Also, to sponsor a family member, a U.S. citizen or LPR must prove they have a stable income and commit to financially support their family members, so they do not rely on public benefits.

## CONCLUSION

In the recent debate in Congress, we appreciate that the recent legislative proposals have moved away from an enforcement-only approach and now seem to be comprehensive in nature. However, we have concerns with the following and hope that members of the Subcommittee will consider these important principles when formulating immigration reform legislation:

- Trigger provisions- Immigration reform legislation must be enacted as quickly as possible so families will be reunited, and the undocumented will come out of the shadows to pursue legal status. We have concerns that the setting of border

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<sup>10</sup> Lowell, Lindsay and Micah Bump. Projecting Immigrant Visas: Report on an Experts Meeting. 2006. <<http://www12.georgetown.edu/sfs/isim/Event%20Summaries&Speeches/Lowell,%20ProjectionsWorkshop.pdf>>.

<sup>11</sup> Immigration through a Family Member. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.5af9bb95919f35e66f614176543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=0775667706f7d010VgnVCM10000048f3d6a1RCRD&vgnnextchannel=4f719c7755cb9010VgnVCM10000045f3d6a1RCRD>



enforcement triggers will result in comprehensive immigration reform being further postponed while we wait for certain ends that may never be achieved.

- Touch back provisions- Some legislative proposals would require immigrants to touch back to their country of origin before pursuing citizenship in the United States. This provision if implemented could prolong the separation of families for long periods of time, and could prevent a quick and easy way for immigrants to continue to work and be able to provide for their family members in the United States.
- Severe cut backs to family immigration- Family immigration is the cornerstone of our immigration system and has allowed immigrants in our communities to thrive in their new environment. Immigration reform must not cut the ability of immigrants to apply for their family members. The unity of family as a basis for immigration should qualify on that merit alone. Any means to undercut family reunification undermines the value of family to our country. We must also be careful that we do not eliminate certain family preference categories for those who have already applied and have been waiting patiently for their members to come to the U.S. This would undermine the fairness of our immigration system and disadvantage those who “played by the rules.”
- Adequate worker visas- Worker visas based on current and projected market demands must be included in immigration reform legislation. The lack of an adequate number of such visas is one of the reasons there is such a large undocumented population in our country today. An immigration bill must be reflective of our changing economic reality but also the rights and dignity of those who come here to work.
- Border security- any border security measure that is proposed must be carefully considered for their effectiveness in increasing our national security and not be used to overly penalize immigrants, or simply provide us with a false sense of security.

We believe that a comprehensive approach is required that goes beyond border protection alone and addresses the current problems of our immigration system, by looking at root causes of immigration, developing workable solutions, and providing dignified relief to the millions of immigrants who are contributing to our communities, despite their lack of legal status. We also advocate for reforms that better protect those seeking refugee and asylum status.

The Lord calls the church to speak prophetically to society and work for the renewal and reform of its structures. The Lord also calls the church to practice the righteous deeds of the kingdom which requires us to demonstrate God’s full love for all, by crossing racial, ethnic, economic, and national boundaries. The issue of immigration reform is a tough issue but also a moral one that our leaders in Congress and the Administration must take up with compassion, not fear, and rational thought, not irrational racism, as the basis for positive dialogue. We must not forget that there is a faith angle to the immigration debate because people are bearers of the image of God and that all Americans, except Native Americans, are immigrants or descendants of immigrants. As Christians, we believe it is our calling to help government live up to its divine mandate to render justice

(Rom. 13:1-7; 1Pet. 2:13-17). In the power of the Holy Spirit, we are compelled outward in service to God and neighbor. Comprehensive Immigration Reform is needed so that we can restore the rule of law yet act compassionately to those in our midst.

Our immigration system must reflect what has made America strong, namely its recognition that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.” As evangelicals we would add to it that we follow Jesus’ example by suffering and living sacrificially for others.

I believe it is wholly possible to create a fair and just system for the immigrants in our country today, and for the future of those who will come; and that it is possible and imperative to do so in this session of the Congress.

Thank you.