Immigration Raids for New Years

At the beginning of this month and with the start of a new year, Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) announced the mass immigration raids that would be conducted with the objective of deporting those who had a deportation awaiting, specifically those immigrants, children included, who had crossed from Central America a few months ago during the massive surge in migration. Over 100 people were arrested in targeted cities across the country, including Charlotte.

These mass raids target Central Americans that are seeking asylum as the migrants are fleeing violence from places like El Salvador, the murder capital of the world. But contrary to the Obama Administration’s pledge last year to keep families together, ICE is targeting families.

Even more disturbing, according to the LA Times (March 6, 2014), since 2013, 7,000 children were ordered deported without being heard in an immigration trial. Many of those that crossed were seeking asylum and should not be deemed a border security threat, which is the justification given by Jeh Johnson.

The Obama Administration has stated that the raids are being conducted to prevent further undocumented immigration, but migration from Mexico has not increased at all. Families who are desperate enough will even risk their lives and everything they have to come to the U.S. Immigrants across the country have been thrown into a state of constant fear and panic knowing that these immigration raids are happening, with some reporting ICE knocking in the middle of the night and rounding up immigrants for imminent deportation. The national raids include children that could potentially be eligible for protection but are not provided with an immigration lawyer that could aid them in navigating our immigration system. The Obama Administration is handling this humanitarian crisis in a way that leaves out compassion and the country’s moral principles it promised to uphold.

Some members of congress have made it known that they disagree with these raid practices, stating that they are inhumane.

During the Iowa Black and Brown Democratic Forum that took place on January 11th, all three Democratic presidential candidates stated their position. Hopefully this will open the floor for some action from the Executive Branch that will stop these raids and bring about positive dialogue that deals with the real issue in a humane and compassionate way.

In response, AFSC is holding a vigil to ask the President to stop these immigration raids taking place. There will also be a Know Your Rights workshop for immigrants and what to do in this difficult situation. This will take place on Saturday, January 16th at the YWCA High Point with the Latino Family Center.

We have also updated our Know Your Rights information, which you can find at www.afsc.org/resource/know-your-rights-what-do-during-immigration-raid.

-Citlaly Mora, AFSC Intern
New Garden Friends Meeting Hosts Refugee Support Gathering

If you listen to the mainstream news, it might have surprised you to walk into the Fellowship Hall of New Garden Friends Meeting last Saturday, January 9 to see it crowded with more than 100 people gathered together to talk about how we can better welcome refugees into our communities. Amidst a climate of anti-refugee, anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment, Saturday’s gathering showed that there continue to be large numbers of people who are seeking to live out the best of our values.

Following a welcome from New Garden Meeting’s new pastor Margaret Webb, who spearheaded the event, the audience heard from longtime refugee advocate and service provider Raleigh Bailey, who gave a brief history of immigration and refugee resettlement in Guilford County. A member of Starmount Presbyterian Church spoke about how her church has assisted in the resettlement of more than 100 people over the years, and what a rich experience it has been both for church members and refugee families.

Representatives of each of Guilford County’s refugee resettlement agencies shared more about the rigorous 13-step resettlement process and how individuals and faith groups can get involved. Speakers included Million Mekennon, Director of African Services Coalition, Stephanie Adams, Director of the Greensboro office of Church World Service (CWS) and Joseph McMann, coordinator of church outreach for World Relief in High Point.

Proportionally, North Carolina receives a high number of refugees, and the Greensboro/Triad area is the top receiver of refugees in the state. Charlotte, Durham and New Bern areas also receive high numbers of refugees.

Around 68,000 refugees are expected to be resettled in the U.S. in 2016, with around 10,000 of those from Syria. The State Department provides very limited support for refugee families: just $900 per person to last their first three months and after that, there is almost no financial assistance available. Resettlement agencies must rely on community support to ensure that refugee families have the resources to help get them on their feet.

Employment rates for refugees are initially very high; however, if individuals end up in low-wage jobs, there is limited mobility- just like for US citizens in the same jobs.

Stephanie shared that CWS has received numerous phone calls from well-intentioned individuals who want to provide support to Syrian refugee families. Because the resettlement process takes around two years, there aren’t many Syrians here yet, and even when they start to arrive in greater numbers, they will make up only about 8% of the total number of refugees. Therefore, it is very important to provide support to any family in need, not only Syrian families that may get extra attention because of the news.

AFSC staff present at the gathering raised the importance of working for policy change in addition to supporting individual families. We can’t talk about welcoming our neighbors without also working for policies that make it possible to do so.

-Lori Khamala, AFSC NC Immigrant Rights Program Director

The U.S. Senate plans to vote on Wed., January 20th on H.R. 4038, “The American Security against Foreign Enemies (SAFE) Act,” which would grind to a halt the resettlement of Syrian and Iraqi refugees. This bill was passed by the House in November, so it is critical that it not pass the Senate.

Call your Senators TODAY & EVERY DAY leading up to the vote on January 20:
Urge them to vote NO on H.R. 4038 and any legislation that would stop, pause or defund the resettlement of Syrian & Iraqi refugees.

1-866-940-2439
On December 17th, 2016, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) joined over 1,500 organizations across the nation opposing the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The TPP is a proposed regional free trade agreement (FTA) designed to encompass the US and Pacific Rim countries in Latin America and Asia. If the agreement is reached it would be the biggest free trade agreement in history. The TPP seeks to boost trade, but the question is at what cost?

First, the TPP puts U.S. employers into a closer competition with companies in countries like Vietnam, with workers legally paid less than 65 cents an hour. The TPP also provides special protection to companies to reallocate their production to low wage countries. Second, in the search of low cost of production the TPP incentivizes companies to challenge human rights. The low cost of production promotes child labor, poor working conditions, low wages, and limits access to benefits, among other things.

Thirdly, the TPP grants companies the right to challenge before international tribunals regulations governing national environmental, land use, health and other areas. In previous agreements, this has led to companies challenging clean air rules in Peru, mining in El Salvador, a provincial fracking moratorium in Canada, and oil regulations in Ecuador. Lastly, many of the TPP’s intellectually property provisions would delay the introduction of low cost generic medications, increasing health care prices and reducing access to medicine.

The negotiations for the TPP are ongoing, but in the meantime this gives people the chance to raise their concerns. So far the response has been very quiet. In North Carolina, AFSC’s Peace & Economic Justice program partnered with local community members and organizations to conduct a lobbying visit to the office of US Congressman, Mark Walker and discuss the TPP and its potential repercussion. As Congress prepares to vote on the TPP, we must raise our concerns and let our legislators be aware that this issue matters to us.

-Jose Oliva, AFSC Intern

Jan 18th is a federal holiday, many businesses and schools in Greensboro are closed in observance of the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK). Dr. King would be 87 years old on the 15th of this month, if he had survived the riddle of bullets that silenced him forever.

As I plan to register voters in the Monday’s MLK day parade, my own thoughts rest on a question. How many more people will succumb to gun violence this year? It was shortly after King’s assignation in 1968, that the U.S. enacted the Gun Control Act. This law banned sales on rifles and shotguns purchased in the mail, and implemented tough stipulations on felons, the mentally ill and drug users. Over the last 48 years, incremental policy change is apparent. But growing evidence suggests that even more American lives will pile up, while a few policy makers wrestle in opposition over gun regulations.

Whether guns are used legally or illegally our military, first-responders, hospitals facilities, surgeons, funeral attendants, physical therapists, counselors, clergy, black markets, gun manufacturers, gun designers, gun magazines, hunting stores, and Walmart would all experience severe revenue adjustment if sweeping legislation interrupted the gun industry.

In his lifetime, the late Reverend made many social statements for change, including the Selma to Montgomery march, bus boycotts in Alabama, and civil rights demonstrations. The public’s concern about guns would most likely be a charge I feel Dr. King would take a stand on even though it may be an unpopular position; it is nonetheless a moral one.

- Toni Etheridge AFSC Peace & Economic Justice Coordinator
Participatory Budgeting Exemplifies Democracy

Participatory Budgeting, a process that just recently has settled itself into Greensboro, visited AFSC’s Youth Justice Group just before the December holidays. They discussed how to make change in Greensboro through a democratic process in which community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget.

The process was first developed in Brazil in 1989, and there are thousands of participatory budgets around the world. Just beginning in August 2015, Greensboro is the first city in the south to implement a participatory budgeting process!

As an AFSC intern, I had the pleasure to attend one of their budget meetings for safety and environment proposals. With other budget delegates, we studied Greensboro statistics from school drop out rates to most impoverished districts in order to determine where most help may be needed. The group brainstormed that the most promising projects may lie in building tent cities for the homeless, making LED street lights, and planting urban gardens. There will be site visits to see which areas will need these resources the most.

Participatory Budgeting is a great way to strengthen democracy in our city. Through the process of research, discussion, and exploration, this organization is creating community leaders. The work done will increase community relationships and empower those who want to make a difference in the community.

The experience was very educational. I learned so much about our city in just an hour and a half. To learn more about participatory budgeting in general, visit http://www.participatorybudgeting.org. To learn more about the process in Greensboro, visit http://www.greensboro-nc.gov/index.aspx?page=4796

- Allison Stalberg, AFSC Intern

AFSC Welcomes our New Intern!

Allison Stalberg studied at Guilford College, double majoring in Anthropology/Sociology and English. Her passions include world travel, writing, and video games. As an intern with AFSC, she is helping lead the "Letters to the Editor" workshop with Greensboro youth in the Peace & Economic Justice program at the North Carolina office.

Moral March on Raleigh HKonJ People’s Assembly

#OurTimeOurVote | Feb. 13, 2016