

No. 0319

(Sense-of-the-Assembly)

ON ASSURING CIVIL LIBERTIES AND EQUAL JUSTICE TO IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

ADOPTED by the General Assembly

Summary

This resolution calls upon the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to take an active stand towards assuring equal rights and justice for individuals being affected by national security initiatives.

Introduction

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has heard, recognized, and shared the frustrations and pain experienced by immigrants who are directly impacted by measures of national security. It is our fervent hope that this resolution can serve as a statement that we are all God's children and therefore deserving of fair treatment regardless of culture, national origin, race, and religion.

Background Information

Certain ethnic communities in the United States have come under intense scrutiny since the terrorist attacks in September 2001. Governmental reactions to these times of national fear and uncertainty have undermined the assurance of civil liberties for immigrants and promoted racial profiling as a legitimate investigative means. Concerned individuals, professional associations, and people in the faith community are speaking out against injustices being committed against immigrants by the U.S. government in the name of national security.

Recently the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has required citizens from specific countries, including Iraq, Egypt, and Sudan, while residing in the United States, to register their identities and whereabouts with DHS. Of the 144,513 men, over the age of 16 and that come from predominantly Muslim countries, who registered before the special registration ended in April 2003, a significant number have been detained for interrogation.¹ Men were often taken without warning from their families and denied meaningful access to legal representation. DHS has started removal proceedings against 13,343 of these men, the vast majority of whom are law-abiding individuals who were attempting to gain legal residency in what they thought of as their new home, the United States. Deportations have already begun, ripping apart established families and communities.

The United States has learned hard lessons about the pain of reacting to national crises with fear and mistrust. As recently as the 1940s, tens of thousands of Japanese and Japanese American people were sent to internment camps during World War II in a large-scale act of racial dehumanization. We must be aware of such injustices and operate as a society that ensures safety and fair treatment for everyone. The United States espouses a commitment to ensuring equal access to justice for all people, regardless of their national, ethnic, or religious identities. This justice is also fundamental to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the public ministry of the church. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has historically been a vehicle and voice for people who have suffered from human and social abuses. Ministries of social and health services, refugee and immigrant programs, international ministries, and leadership and education development are only some of the ways the church works to eradicate pain and suffering in the world. Our advocacy and efforts to highlight the rights and needs of immigrants continue in this tradition of public witness.

WHEREAS, in the Hebrew Scriptures, our God commands, You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt (Ex. 22:21 NRSV); and

WHEREAS, according to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus Christ, with his mother and father, took refuge in Egypt to flee persecution by Herod (Matt. 2:13-21 NRSV); and

WHEREAS, current governmental practices often target people on the basis of national, ethnic and religious identity rather than on the basis of actual criminal evidence; and

WHEREAS, resulting from racial discrimination and the possibility of deportation, many people are feeling the strain of joblessness, economic uncertainty, and fear.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada, meeting in Charlotte, North Carolina, October 17-21, 2003, direct the General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to communicate this resolution to the President of the United States, the Attorney General, the Secretary of Homeland Security, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the minority leaders of the Senate and House, requesting that the government ensure adequate legal representation and appropriate civil liberties to all immigrants being targeted and detained for national security reasons; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the General Assembly urge congregations and regions to remember and be in prayer for and with those individuals and families being affected by actions and injustices committed in the name of national security, as they celebrate David Kagwada Sunday, September 12, 2004, and the week of North American Pacific Asian Disciples (NAPAD) ministries, September 12-18, 2004.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the General Assembly direct the Council on Christian Unity to continue to seek opportunities for congregations and regions to be engaged in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and other efforts to raise awareness about the needs and issues related to civil liberties for our immigrant communities; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the General Assembly encourage its representatives to communicate to their congregations and regions:

- » The need for the government and American citizens to recognize the United States as a nation of immigrants whose strength emerges from that diversity;
- " The history of the pain caused by the targeting of specific racial, ethnic, and religious groups in the United States;
- " The importance of educating themselves and others about issues faced by immigrant communities, embracing ways of actively supporting immigrants and their families, and furthering efforts of peace and reconciliation among all of God's people.

¹ S. Miller and M. Clark, New Security Measures Irk Civil Rights Activists, CSMonitor.com, June 2003.