COMPROMISED IMMIGRATION REFORM: WHY I CAN’T SUPPORT S. 744

by Karma R. Chávez, WNPJ Board Member

Local immigrant rights and justice organizations, coordinated through the Wisconsin Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (WNIRR, of which WNPJ is a member), have largely decided to support S.744, the “Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act,” which was passed by the U.S. Senate in June.

The coordinated effort that Voces de la Frontera and WNIRR have put into contacting elected officials and organizing local allies is laudable. Prior to the release of the first version of the Senate’s bill, I was a part of those efforts. But not all immigrant rights and justice activists are offering their support. The Union de Trabajadores Inmigrantes (UTI) in Madison will not support a bill that criminalizes more undocumented people and will lead to more deportations. UTI’s Alex Gillis suggests that real immigration reform must address free trade agreements and the global economic situation. On the UTI Facebook page, Gillis questioned whether groups should advocate against the bad parts while pushing for something better, or take a “wait and see” approach to see how the process unfolds in the House of Representatives. These are difficult questions. There is important reason for those of us like me, U.S. citizens not living on the U.S.-Mexico border, to think carefully through them.

I have had difficulty actively opposing this bill given that I am a U.S. citizen, when some immigrants, with whom I consider myself an ally, support it. Why do they support it? This bill provides a pathway to citizenship for an estimated seven million of the 11 million undocumented people living in the United States. Some would be eligible for what is called “Registered Provisional Immigrant” (RPI) status. Young people who qualify for the DREAM Act, and some agricultural workers, will be able to access a somewhat accelerated pathway toward citizenship (at least 5-10 years after applying for RPI status). These two groups...
In July 2013, IEG organized two community conversation events: “Communities of Peace, Justice and Sustainability” with the Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice’s outreach team. The first was held at the Urban Ecology Center-Riverside Park in Milwaukee in collaboration with the Interfaith Earth Network, and the second at the Islamic Society of Milwaukee. Both events were part of “Power Down” and “Green Ramadan.”

We consider environmental justice, the right for clean air, pure water, healthy food, good sanitation, etc., as a human rights issue. Our major goal is to work with others to make environmental justice a reality for all.

Justice is the basis of all human relations and a foundation of Islamic rule. There is one word that captures the essence of all Islamic laws and all Islamic teachings; one word that describes the overriding value that permeates all Islamic values - Justice. God says in the Qur’an (57:25): “We sent aforetime our messengers with clear signs and sent down with them the Book and the Balance that humans may stand forth in Justice.”

In the Qur’an (15:19), God says, “And the earth we have spread out; set thereon mountains firm and immovable; and produced therein all kinds of things in due balance.” In the Qur’an (55:7-9), “…and God has set up the Balance (of Justice), in order that ye may not transgress (due) balance. So establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance.” And another verse from the Qur’an (3:108), “These are the Signs of God: We rehearse them to thee in Truth: And God means no injustice to any of His creatures.”

Ramadan is a powerful, transformative experience. During the holy month of Ramadan, we can transform our lives and move away from a consumption-focused life to a life of moderation. It is the time to reflect on our wants and what we really need to live a peaceful, simple life on this earth.

I pray that we reduce our ecological footprint and use Ramadan’s spiritual experience as an opportunity to reflect on our own lives and move away from materialistic culture and the waste it leaves behind. It is the ideal time to put into practice the Islamic environmental teachings to care for Earth and all its inhabitants and to stand up for environmental justice, climate justice, clean air, clean water, healthy food, and sanitation for all as a basic human rights and creation rights issue. Help us, God, to do good work to keep Earth balanced, just, peaceful and sustainable for all. Amen.

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