



Statement of Principles for Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Immigrant Asian women are vital contributors to the economic and social wealth of our communities. Of the estimated 13.5 million Asian Americans living in the U.S., approximately two-thirds are foreign-born,¹ and an estimated 1.2 million are undocumented.² Although our communities are diverse in ethnicities and cultures, we all share the need for immigration reform that provides workable solutions that uphold our nation's values to fix our broken immigration system.

To move forward together, comprehensive immigration reform must consider the unique needs of immigrant women. Currently, women and girls represent more than half of the immigrant population gaining legal permanent resident status.³ Yet immigrant Asian women, especially those who are undocumented, face immigration restrictions, language barriers, and social constraints that limit their ability to achieve economic self-sufficiency and independence. When relegated to low-wage work sectors such as garment industries, food services, and private households, immigrant Asian women are more susceptible to exploitation and harassment. Furthermore, Asian survivors of trafficking or domestic violence language lack the language fluency and knowledge of the U.S. legal system to access life-saving legal and support services.

NAPAWF believes that true comprehensive immigration reform must be grounded in principles of human rights and include provisions that support all immigrants, their families, and communities. Just and humane immigration policies must prevent the trafficking and exploitation of immigrants and end harsh immigration enforcement practices. In partnership with immigrant rights, women's rights, and reproductive justice organizations, NAPAWF will advocate for comprehensive immigration reform legislation that incorporates the following set of principles:

Provide a Path to Permanent Residency and Citizenship

Immigrant Asian women contribute to the U.S. economy, keep their families together, pay taxes, invest in their children's education, and are an integral part of their communities. We need to promote an immigration system that recognizes their important contributions and creates reasonable channels to citizenship, lawful status, and access to both high and low-wage worker visas.

Reunite American Families and Communities

The current system leaves hundreds of thousands of Asian women waiting 6-22 years in the immigration backlogs to reunite with their families.⁴ The backlogs in family-sponsored and

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey—Asians: 2004*, Feb. 2007.

² U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigration Population Residing in the United States*, January 2008.

³ Department of Homeland Security, *Table 8: Persons Obtaining Legal Permanent Resident Status by Gender, Age, Marital Status, and Occupation: Fiscal Year 2008*, in *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: 2008*.

⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Visa Bulletin*, July 2009.



employment-based immigration cases have a detrimental impact on Asian American families and their communities. Of the millions of individuals who are caught in the backlog, more than one-third are from Asian countries.⁵ An immigration reform bill that values families must also include equal rights for LGBTQ permanent partners to sponsor their foreign partner. We must reduce inefficiencies and reallocate resources to ensure that all families are reunified in a humane and timely manner.

Protect All U.S. Workers

Immigrant Asian women are often at the bottom of the economic ladder. Undocumented women workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, sexual harassment, and discrimination. Immigration reform policies must ensure that all workers are covered under existing employment and labor laws, regardless of their immigration status, and establish meaningful enforcement of labor laws and protections. Immigration enforcement practices must target unscrupulous employers who misuse employment verification mechanisms to intimidate or retaliate against workers, and include due process and privacy protections. In addition, Asian immigrant women who enter as a dependent spouse (H-4 visa) must have work authorization.

Promote Sensible and Humane Enforcement Strategies and Ensure Safe Treatment of Detainees

Local law enforcement and government agencies should not be granted the authority to enforce federal immigration matters. In addition, detention alternatives and humanitarian release should be the favored practice over detention. At a minimum, immigrants in detention, 10 percent of whom are women, must receive safe and humane treatment and care. This includes developing standards that cover women's unique physical, social, emotional, and health care needs, including routine gynecological exams, pre- and post-natal care, and treatment for those who have been victims of sexual assault and domestic violence.

Ensure Access to Social Services and Support for All Immigrant and Refugee Women

Immigrant Asian women who are trafficked, seeking asylum or trapped in abusive relationships are often discouraged from seeking police assistance due to fear of deportation and lack of knowledge about the legal system. These women must have support and opportunities to report their abusers without facing sanctions or being forced to rely on the prosecution of their abuser or traffickers to remain in the country. NAPAWF advocates for the timely, effective, and culturally appropriate delivery of basic health and social services to all Asian American women and girls, regardless of immigration status.

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NAPAWF is the only national, multi-issue Asian & Pacific Islander women's organization in the country. NAPAWF's mission is to build a movement to advance social justice and human rights for API women and girls. For more info contact Priscilla Huang at phuang@napawf.org.

⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Visa Bulletin*, March 2009.