

WITNESS IN WASHINGTON WEEKLY

The Washington Office of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

June 10, 2009

This week's messages are-

- Help Allow Documented Immigrant Families to Reunite
- Sick Workers Should Get Time Off
- Tell Obama: Christians Support Bold Action for Holy Land Peace
- Deuteronomy 31:30-32:4 - The Song of Moses

Help Allow Documented Immigrant Families to Reunite

Urge your Senators to co-sponsor the Reuniting Families Act

The Reuniting Families Act (S. 1085) was reintroduced by Senators Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Edward Kennedy (D-MA), and Charles Schumer (D-NY). If enacted, the Reuniting Families Act would reunite family members who have been separated for years due to a backlogged, broken immigration system.

Action Needed:

- Call your Senators: Call the Capitol switchboard operator at 202-224-3121 and ask to be transferred to your Senators. You will be transferred to the receptionist of each office. Tell them that as a constituent you urge them to Co-Sponsor the Reuniting Families Act so that families who are separated due to our inefficient immigration system will be reunited in an efficient manner.
- Send them an email: Go to the Presbyterian Legislative Action Center www.pcusa.org/washington and send your congressman an email. A sample email is included below.

Background:

U.S. Immigration Law provides that any immigrant residing in the country who has attained permanent resident status, or has naturalized as a U.S citizen, can apply for visas for his/her immediate family members (a spouse, children, siblings, and parents), not including aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, etc., to join him/her in the United States. However, as the system operates now, there is a backlog of cases and requests that have considerably slowed down the process, and as a result many families have been separated for as long as 24 years. If the system is left to operate the way it has in the past, the situation will only worsen as the backlog increases and families are kept separated.

The Reuniting Families Act Would:

- Reduce the lengthy backlog of lawful permanent residents' spouses and children and classify stepchildren and children of fiancés as "immediate family relatives".
- Distribute visas more equitably between countries, thus reducing the backlog without increasing visa numbers.
- Recapture unused and unclaimed visas, and allow families to reunite despite the death of the main petitioner or arbitrary bars to entry.
- Recognize the sacrifices of our military by exempting children of World War II Filipino veterans from numerical caps.
- Foster stronger communities which will enable immigrants to contribute more fully to the economic and social development of the country, as families increase the success of integration and quality of life.

Faith Reflection

"So they are no longer two, but one... Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." Matthew 19:6

Sample Email

As your constituent, I urge you to cosponsor S. 1085, the Reuniting Families Act, which was introduced to the Senate on May 20, 2009, by Senators Menendez (D-NJ), Gillibrand (D-NY), Kennedy (D-MA), and Schumer (D-NY).

The United States recognizes the importance of family, and as such has put a mechanism in place within our immigration laws to allow U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents (LPRs) to file for visas for their immediate family members. There are currently many citizens and LPRs residing in the United States who years after filing for their loved ones, are still awaiting reunification with them. These immigrants are members of our communities and benefit our economy and our society. They deserve to have their families with them. The Reuniting Families Act would help reunite these families and make the family reunification process more efficient.

The Reuniting Families Act would reduce lengthy backlogs by rightfully classifying lawful permanent resident spouses and children as "immediate relatives." If enacted, S.1085 would allocate visas more equitably between countries, thus reducing the backlog without increasing visa numbers. If enacted, the bill would also recapture unused visas and allow families to reunite despite the death of the main petitioner or arbitrary bars to entry. It would also recognize the sacrifices of our military by exempting children of World War II Filipino veterans from numerical caps. These measures would clean out the system, and therefore hasten the reunification process.

If Congress fails to act, the tragedy of broken families will continue as husbands live without their wives, wives without their husbands, and children without a parent, or in some cases, both parents. By allowing family separation to continue due to our broken immigration laws, the United States is complicit in impeding the emotional, social, and intellectual growth of children and decreasing the economic opportunity of entire family units.

By enacting this bill to reunite families in a timely manner, we will be increasing the integrity of our legal system, securing our economic future, and giving families the opportunity to truly pursue the American Dream.

As your constituent, I urge you to consider the plight of these immigrant families, and uphold the integrity of the family unit by co-sponsoring S. 1085, the Reuniting Families Act. I urge you to co-sponsor this bill so that families that have long been separated by our broken immigration system can be reunited and the U.S. immigration system can more efficiently facilitate family reunification.

General Assembly Guidance:

The 201st General Assembly (1989) called upon the governing bodies and congregations to become aware and to minister to the needs of undocumented immigrants in their midst; and to work for immigration legislation which has a broad amnesty for current residents; ends employer sanctions; promotes education opportunity; and sets a goal of family reunification as a basis for future immigration policy.

Sick Workers Should Get Time Off

Please urge your Representative to become a co-sponsor of the Healthy Families Act, H.R. 2460, which will allow workers to earn paid sick days. This legislation was just introduced in the House, and will have a better chance of passing if more representatives co-sponsor it.

The Healthy Families Act will allow workers to earn up to seven paid sick days per year. These can be used for personal illness, care of an ill family member, birth of a child or adoption, recovery from stalking, sexual assault or domestic violence. In this economic climate, a basic workplace standard of paid sick days would help prevent workers from being forced to choose between their own health or the health of a family member -and their paychecks or even their jobs.

Generally, higher paid workers already receive a paid sick leave benefit. However, lower-wage workers who can't afford to miss a day's pay rarely receive this benefit. Nearly half (48 percent) of private-sector workers do not have access to paid, job-protected time off to recover from illness or to care for a sick family member.

Seventy-nine percent of low-income workers do not have a single paid sick day. Consequently, one in six workers report that they or a family member have been fired, suspended, punished or threatened with being fired for taking time off due to personal illness or to care for a sick relative, according to a 2008 University of Chicago survey.

The lack of paid sick days is also a public health concern. Workers who interact with the public every day are much less likely to have paid sick days. Only 22 percent of food and hotel workers have any paid sick days, for example. Workers in child care centers, retail clerks, and nursing homes also disproportionately lack paid sick days. When working people have no choice but to go to work sick, their colleagues and all others they contact face an increased risk of contracting illness.

Click <http://capwiz.com/pcusa/issues/alert/?alertid=13457321> to send a message to your member of Congress urging him or her to support this legislation.

The legislation would not limit any existing benefits, and would broaden the scope for many.

General Assembly Guidance:

The 216th General Assembly approved the "Transforming Families" report, which urged advocacy "for local, state, and federal legislation that might strengthen family life." The Assembly further urged legislation that "induce[s] employers to offer more flexible work hours, more paid leave for the care of dependent persons and child-related activities, more telecommuting options, more possibilities for part-time jobs with prorated wages and benefits, family-supporting wages for all workers, and more available, affordable, and flexible child care programs." (*Minutes*, 2004, Part I, pp. 759-760)

Tell Obama: Christians Support Bold Action for Holy Land Peace

The Obama Administration has made clear its commitment to pursuing Israeli-Palestinian peace in a series of recent meetings with key Mideast leaders and in a major speech to the Arab and Muslim world on Thursday, June 4. In Cairo, President Obama pledged to "personally pursue" the goal of two states living in peace and security, saying it was time for all of us to work for the day when the "Holy Land of three great faiths is the place of peace that God intended it to be; when Jerusalem is a secure and lasting home for Jews and Christians and Muslims." View the full speech [here](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-Cairo-University-6-04-09/).

http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-Cairo-University-6-04-09/

Join major Christian leaders from Catholic, Evangelical, Protestant, Orthodox and historic African American traditions who have come together at this critical moment to declare their support for bold U.S. action and to call for meaningful progress to achieve a just and lasting peace.

In a diverse ecumenical letter released last week, over 50 Christian leaders commended the President's message to the people of the Middle East and strong commitment to resolving the conflict, pledging to "rally Christians nationwide around robust U.S. peacemaking efforts to achieve Israeli-Palestinian peace." View the full text of the letter here. <http://www.cmep.org/boldaction/ecumenical-letter.pdf>

Will you add your name to the ecumenical letter and take a stand for Holy Land peace? Please click <http://action.cmep.org/t/4029/signUp.jsp?key=1013>. If the President is going to provide the kind of sustained, hands-on U.S. diplomacy necessary to help move the parties forward and finally end this conflict, he will need encouragement and support.

Now is indeed a critical moment in the long history of this conflict. Despite widespread support for a two-state solution, the window of opportunity is closing. As hope dims, the threat of violence grows and hard-line voices are strengthened. The dwindling Palestinian Christian community may soon cease to exist without an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement that provides security and dignity for all.

Let President Obama know that you and Christians nationwide support bold, immediate American leadership. Click here. <http://action.cmep.org/t/4029/signUp.jsp?key=1013>.

Peace between Israel and the Palestinians will require the strong and helping hand of the United States. While working to end rocket attacks against the people of southern Israel, the U.S. should also seek immediate relief for the population of Gaza by ending restrictions on humanitarian goods and opening the borders to reconstruction material, commerce and transit in a secure manner.

As the President said in his speech in Cairo, "the obligations that the parties have agreed to under the Road Map are clear. For peace to come, it is time for them - and all of us - to live up to our responsibilities." Supporters of the status quo will discourage strong U.S. leadership. Please join us in commending Obama for his important statements pressing both Israel and the Palestinians to take action for peace. It is vital that we encourage the Administration to continue to bolster Palestinian capacity to halt violence and continue to demonstrate firm dedication to a viable Palestinian state by exhibiting no tolerance for Israeli settlement activity.

Take action today and help support strong peace efforts by the Obama Administration by visiting: www.cmep.org/boldaction.

General Assembly Guidance:

The 216th General Assembly (2004)

4. Reiterates and reaffirms the call of last year's General Assembly on the Israeli government to "end the occupation now," asserting that:
 - a. The occupation must end; it has proven to be at the root of evil acts committed against innocent people on both sides of the conflict.
 - b. The security of Israel and the Israeli people is inexorably dependent on making peace with their Palestinian neighbors, by negotiating and reaching a just and equitable solution to the conflict that respects international law, human rights, the sanctity of life, and dignity of persons, land, property, safety of home, freedom of movement, the rights of refugees to return to their homeland, the right of a people to determine their political future, and to live in peace and prosperity.
 - c. Horrific acts of violence and deadly attacks on innocent people, whether carried out by Palestinian "suicide bombers" or by the Israeli military, are abhorrent and inexcusable by all measures, and are a dead-end alternative to a negotiated settlement of the conflict.
 - d. The United States needs, now more than ever, to become an honest, even-handed broker for peace, and should review its approach to the problem, allowing more room for the more meaningful participation of other members of the U.N.-designated "Quartet" (the United States, Russia, Germany and France) and others;
 - e. The international community has an obligation to provide physical protection for those isolated by fear and/or by physical and psychological barriers, thus making space for the restoration of security and creating a climate for the resumption of negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians. We support the Palestinians' persistent request to the United Nations to send a peacekeeping force.

5. Vigorously urges the U.S. government, the government of Israel, and the Palestinian leadership to move swiftly, and with resolve, to recognize that the only way out of this chronic and vicious impasse is to abandon all approaches that exacerbate further strife, lay aside arrogant political posturing, and get on with forging negotiated compromises that open a path to peace.

Deuteronomy 31:30-32:4 - The Song of Moses

CEV Translation

Moses called a meeting of all the people of Israel, so he could teach them the words to the song that the Lord had given him. And here are the words:

Earth and Sky, listen to what I say!
Israel, I will teach you.

My words will be like gentle rain
on tender young plants,

or like dew on the grass.

Join with me in praising
the wonderful name
of the Lord our God.

The Lord is a mighty rock,
And God never does wrong.
God can always be trusted
to bring justice.

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Thank You.

Published by the Witness in Washington Weekly advocacy program of the Washington Office, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 100 Maryland Avenue, NE Washington D.C. 20002, (202) 543-1126 www.pcusa.org/washington. For more information about the content of this article, please email us at ga_washington_office@pcusa.org. If you would like to receive this information directly, please go to <http://capwiz.com/pcusa/mlm/signup/>.