

Boston College Center for Human Rights & International Justice:

We Applaud President Obama's Announced Executive Action on Immigration But Reiterate the Need for Comprehensive Immigration Reform

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November 21, 2014 - Last night, President Barack Obama announced long-awaited plans for executive action that is expected to shield approximately five million individuals from deportation and provide many of them with work permits. The new policy extends to parents of US citizens and lawful permanent residents who have been living in the US for five years. It also expands the current Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which was created by the administration two years ago to grant a reprieve from deportation to undocumented youth who came to the US as children. In addition, the President announced a Priority Enforcement Program to replace the current Secure Communities program – which institutionalized information-sharing among local, state and federal law enforcement agencies. Though narrower in focus, the new program will continue the practice of collaboration between local law enforcement and immigration authorities, threatening ongoing erosion of police-community trust. The President's actions are a welcomed – though partial and long overdue – step towards addressing the harsh and disproportionate effects of recent deportation policies, and will change for the better the lives of millions of currently undocumented immigrants as well as their US citizen and lawful permanent resident spouses and children.

However, many more will be left without relief, including parents of young people who have been granted a reprieve from deportation through the DACA program. The recommended policies continue to divide the migrant community, selecting some as “deserving” while further marginalizing the “undeserving” and fails to address root causes underlying what the vast majority of people agrees is a broken system. Thus, the need for comprehensive immigration reform continues – not only to provide pathways to regularizing status and to citizenship for undocumented individuals who are long-term residents of the US, but also to eliminate punitive features of our immigration law that make deportation based on increasingly minor criminal offenses mandatory even for long-term green card holders.

The Center for Human Rights and International Justice at Boston College has, since its creation, advocated for proportionality, compassion, and respect for family unity in our nation's immigration and deportation laws and practices. The Center seeks to nurture a new generation of scholars and practitioners in the United States and abroad who draw upon the strengths of many disciplines, and the wisdom of rigorous ethical training in the attainment of human rights and international justice. Its ***Migration and Human Rights Project*** works with community-based organizations to develop human rights research and advocacy skills among immigrant community members within the United States while at the same time generating action oriented data and information. Its ***Post-Deportation Human Rights Project*** aims to conceptualize an entirely new area of law, providing direct representation to individuals who have been deported and promoting the rights of deportees and their family members through research, policy analysis, human rights advocacy, and training programs. The CHRIJ supports President Obama's executive order while continuing to actively advocate for a more permanent and just solution through comprehensive immigration reform.

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