

**AMERICAN BAPTIST
POLICY STATEMENT ON
IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE POLICY**

Because of the Biblical mandate that we be a caring and hospitable community, that we love our neighbors, that we establish justice and proclaim liberty; because we have a sense of Christian responsibility to serve human needs; because of our commitment to respect the human rights of all people; and because we are mainly a nation of immigrants, we, the American Baptist Churches USA, shall:

1. Continue our historical role as an advocate of human rights* for immigrants, refugees, migrants and asylum seekers.
2. Continue our historical role in resettlement of refugees and in assisting immigrants.
3. Continue to partner with Church World Service and cooperate with other religious, volunteer and community agencies in the servicing and resettlement of refugees.
4. Continue to raise the consciousness of the Church and society regarding the needs of refugees and immigrants and their contribution to American society and the Biblical truth that we are all God's children.
5. Engage in wholistic ministry to immigrants, refugees, migrants, asylum seekers and overstayed and undocumented persons in Department of Homeland Security and other detention facilities in the United States and in local communities, offering assistance in such areas as:
 - (a) fellowship - establishing social and spiritual community
 - (b) worship and evangelism
 - (c) civic education
 - (d) language training
 - (e) counseling - documentation, employment, citizenship, financial, cultural orientation.

Further:

- A. We affirm the right of all persons in the United States to be served by public agencies.
- B. We believe that there should be a statute of limitations for deportable offenses. We further believe that offenses committed in other countries for which the debt to society has been paid should not be a bar to immigration. Recognizing the inequities in the laws of different countries, we believe that offenses committed in other countries, which might be a bar to immigration, should be evaluated in the light of laws of the United States.
- C. We affirm the right of all persons in this country to preserve their cultural identities.
- D. We also recognize the responsibility of society to provide opportunities to newcomers to acquire skills which will enable them to work and function in their new environment as responsible members of society.

* Refer to the American Baptist Policy Statement on Human Rights.

- E. We affirm that the admissions policy of the U.S.A. should be humane, just, and workable and preference should be given to:
- (1) Reunification of families. We define "family" to mean members of a household unit.
 - (2) Refugees. (See definition in paragraph F)
 - (3) Victims of systemic economic deprivation.
 - (4) Persons who can assist in meeting special employment needs including seasonal and guest workers.
 - (5) Persons from nations sharing contiguous borders with the United States of America. We believe that there should be flexibility in the policy of immigration with Mexico and Canada because of their special historic relationship in terms of family migration and economic ties.

(6)
In addition we call for:

- (1) Provisions for emergency admissions beyond the annual ceiling.
- (2) Review of numerical limits every ten years taking into account
 - (a) Economic, social, political, ecological, agricultural, and demographic national and global conditions.
 - (b) The pursuit of a more equitable and Intercultural society in this country.

F. We affirm the following definition of a "refugee" as found in the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1101 (a) (42):

- (1) The term "refugee" means:
 - (a) any person who is outside any country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, or
 - (b) in such special circumstances as the President after appropriate consultation (as defined in section 1157 (e) of title 28) may specify, any person who is within the country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, within the country such person is habitually residing, and who is persecuted or who has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

G. We recognize that the global dimension of the refugee situation places a responsibility on all nations, and we call upon all nations to share this obligation.

H. We believe that refugees admitted to the United States of America should satisfy regular immigration criteria and not be subject to one year of conditional entrance before achieving permanent resident status.

I. We believe that for practical and humane reasons there should be a process for out-of-status undocumented persons whose conduct meets naturalization requirements to earn their legal status and pursue an eventual path to earned citizenship.

J. We believe that unauthorized immigration must end, and we can move in

that direction by providing assistance and being a resource through the private sector for the economic development of poor nations, thus enabling them to create sufficient labor markets within their own borders; by encouraging the implementation in all countries of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as it applies to the right to a decent standard of living.

- K. We affirm that laws regulating wages and hours, working conditions, and employment discrimination, must be universally enforced.
- L. We believe that government agencies should be provided with sufficient resources to enable them to facilitate the legal processing of immigrants and enforce the immigration law humanely and justly.
- M. We support the establishment of courts independent of the Department of Homeland Security to try immigration cases in order to insure objectivity and justice.

For Christians, the only acceptable and sustainable immigration and refugee policy for the United States must be one that reflects humanitarian values, responds to the needs of people within and outside of our own nation alike, and recognizes the effect our trade and foreign assistance policies have on developing countries if internal pressures for emigration are to be reduced.

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