



Response to Harassment of Refugees and Undocumented Immigrants

February 22, 2017

On Friday, February 17, Christinne Muschi, a Reuters photographer working in Quebec, Canada, photographed a family of eight, including four children attempting to enter Canada from a border-crossing near Lake Champlain, New York. All are Sudanese; they had been living in Delaware for two years, seeking political asylum. Under the Trump administration, they feared their asylum application would be denied. The Canadian customs officials helped them scramble up a snowy bank, and they escaped into Quebec.

Their escape came at the end of a busy week for the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Agency. On February 16, The Washington Post reported that nearly 700 people had been rounded up for deportation, including a number of people with no criminal records, as well as Dreamers formerly covered by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Act. Yesterday the Department of Homeland Security released a far-reaching set of orders, requiring substantial expansion of Border Patrol & ICE agents, of deportation facilities, and of the program allowing local law enforcement to act as federal immigration officers.

Over the last two weeks, newspapers have reported increasing harassment of foreigners entering the United States and a significant increase in the number of people seeking political refuge in Canada. Immigrant and asylum-seeking communities in major cities live in fear of exposure and arrest. That the United States, traditionally a destination of hope for oppressed people around the world, would close its borders and force law-abiding people to escape to another country violates the very essence of the American character. While President Obama deported more people than any other president, the current situation further hurts families in the United States who have come seeking safety, freedoms, and economic security sought by most past immigrants to the United States.

The United States has experienced xenophobic, anti-immigrant hysteria in the past, directed against Germans, Italians, the Irish, the Chinese, Jews, the Japanese, South and Central Americans, Mexicans, and others. But most Americans deplore racism and xenophobia, and most are proud that the United States has been a haven for the oppressed. Many Americans know that immigrants have made this country rich; refugees have contributed in every possible way to the prosperity of this country.

The Peace Studies faculty of Chapman University are united in opposition to this senseless, self-defeating attack on visitors, immigrants, undocumented citizens, and refugees. This country can and should do better.