

PUBLIC STATEMENT FROM SOUTH ASIAN ORGANIZATIONS
REGARDING IMMIGRATION REFORM (April 10, 2006)

**SOUTH ASIAN ADVOCATES STRONGLY URGE CONGRESS TO PASS
IMMIGRATION REFORM THAT RESPECTS CIVIL RIGHTS OF
IMMIGRANTS**

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As representatives of organizations that serve South Asians across the United States – from empowering women, workers and youth to protecting the civil rights and liberties of ethnic and religious minorities – we see firsthand the impact of the immigration system on our community. As Congress prepares to pass the broadest immigration reform law in decades, we urge lawmakers to adopt sensible and humane solutions to fix the broken immigration system in the United States.

The South Asian community is predominantly foreign-born, with individuals tracing their backgrounds to Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the diaspora, including the Caribbean, Africa and Europe. Any immigration law passed by Congress will undoubtedly affect the entire community as well as future immigrants.

Our organizations have already witnessed the impact of anti-immigrant sentiment, xenophobia and ill-conceived policies implemented by federal, state and local law enforcement on the South Asian community. We assist low-wage workers who work in the domestic service, restaurant and retail industries and often face difficult conditions and exploitation in the workplace. We advocate on behalf of survivors of domestic violence who are in need of assistance from social workers, lawyers and counselors. We hear from South Asians who have been waiting for years to be reunited with their family members due to the enormous backlog of visa applications. And we provide services to South Asian youth, many of whom are undocumented and are denied avenues to citizenship and higher education.

Congress has an opportunity now to identify humane and sensible measures to address many of these situations. However, the House of Representatives

disappointed immigrants in December of last year by passing a bill that would criminalize those with undocumented status and would make the provision of services to undocumented immigrants a violation of the law in some contexts.

Now, it is the Senate's turn to pass a bill on immigration issues. Two bills are before the Senate right now – one that passed the Judiciary Committee, and another introduced by Majority Leader Senator Frist. Both contain harsh enforcement provisions which would take a significant toll on immigrant communities around the country.

While the Senate bill that passed the Judiciary Committee contains some positive provisions - including the legalization of over 11 million undocumented immigrants in the US and the expansion of educational and vocational opportunities for young people with undocumented status – its harsh stance towards enforcement of immigration law undercuts many of the highlights. These enforcement provisions would allow non-citizens to be indefinitely detained; would criminalize minor offenses such as the failure to file a change of address form; and would give local police the authority to enforce complex immigration laws locally, paving the way for mistakes, profiling, and distrust.

Legislation that does not balance the civil rights of immigrants will lead to separated families, isolation and fear, and distrust of law enforcement and government officials. We believe that our country's immigration policies must reflect fundamental civil and human rights principles, which include:

- **Establishing a path to permanent residency and citizenship for undocumented immigrants**
- **Opposing criminalization of undocumented status and expansion of grounds for indefinite detention.**
- **Reducing the visa backlog by eliminating visa caps and expediting the processing of applications**
- **Promoting citizenship and civic participation**

Our organizations come together from Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, New Jersey, San Francisco, New York, and Washington, DC to urge lawmakers to pass legislation that embraces these principles. We also make this statement today to urge our community members to make their voices heard to lawmakers about the urgency for fair immigration reform.

ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTING THIS STATEMENT INCLUDE:

Adhikaar (New York City)

Andolan (New York City)

Alliance of South Asians Taking Action (San Francisco)

Chaya (Seattle)

Coney Island Avenue Project (New York City)

Council of Peoples Organization (New York City)

Desist (San Francisco)

Desis Rising Up and Moving (New York City)

DC Collective for South Asians (Washington, DC)

Friends of South Asia (San Francisco)

Kiran (Raleigh-Durham)

Legal Access Network of South Asians (New York City)

Manavi (New Jersey)

Narika (San Francisco)

Raksha (Atlanta)

Sakhi for South Asian Women (New York City)

Sikh Coalition (New York City)

Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (Washington DC area)

South Asian American Leaders of Tomorrow (Washington DC area)

South Asian Youth Action (New York City)

South Asian Network (Los Angeles)