Decriminalize Immigration. Survivors Need Routes to Safety and Healing.

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON - Last week, Attorney General Jeff Sessions ruled that domestic violence is not grounds for granting asylum to immigrants who arrive in the United States in search of safety. This vicious and dangerous ruling occurred in the midst of the president’s “zero tolerance” measures at the southern border which now requires criminal prosecutions of undocumented immigrants. It was this new criminalization of immigration that led to the separation of more than 2,300 children from their families.

The white supremacist roots of our colonial nation, which allowed for the systematic enslavement of black people and the genocide of native communities, was built on the destruction of kinship structures in order to build the isolation and trauma needed for masters to wield power over those they sought to dominate. The incarceration of whole families was seen in the Japanese internment camps. And today, this inhumane state violence is being replicated against those seen as “other” and as undeserving of basic human rights and dignity. We see this in the overrepresentation of black and brown bodies in prisons and detention facilities, still forced to labor for U.S. corporations owned by the ruling class.

According to the Huffington Post, eighty percent of Central American women and girls are raped crossing the border into the U.S. This journey to escape violence and economic exploitation is dangerous and brutal and the economic conditions that led us here are largely due to U.S. policy, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement. API Chaya is outraged by the criminalization of immigration, the increased development of detention facilities, and the removal of asylum as a route to safety for survivors.

We call for the dismantling of the Department of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the demilitarization of the U.S. border. Imprisoning survivors is not the solution. We further demand:

- The swift reunification all children separated from parents at the border.
- Respect for the 1997 Flores v. Reno Settlement Agreement and the 2008 Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) which limits the detention of children.
- Guaranteed legal representation for every person in any immigration hearing.
- Respect for transgender and all gender non-conforming people in immigration detention.
- State-funded routes to housing, healing, and safety for survivors of state-produced violence.

API Chaya’s mission is to empower survivors of gender-based violence and human trafficking to gain safety, connection, and wellness. We build power by educating and mobilizing South Asian, Asian, Pacific Islander, and all immigrant communities to end exploitation, creating a world where all people can heal and thrive. Find us this weekend at Trans Pride, Youth Pride, and Dyke March. Join us and our community partners for daily (M-F) vigils for human rights in front of the Seattle ICE office, 1000 2nd Ave. For survivors of violence, our helpline is open M-F, 10am-4pm at 1-877-922-4292. Our services are free, confidential, and open to all, regardless of immigration status. ###