

HUMAN RIGHTS INDEX

*Prepared by the University of Iowa Center for Human Rights (UICHR)**

All over the world, people leave their home countries for many reasons: fear of persecution, better employment, the attainment of more gratifying standards of living, and simple wanderlust among them. The rights of such persons—migrants—are formally proclaimed and protected by numerous international instruments, especially the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1949 Convention Concerning Migration for Employment of the International Labor Organization, and migrant protection agreements adopted by the United Nations in 1990 and 2000. As is generally true elsewhere, U.S. law does not give people the right to enter our country freely. Once here, however, they are guaranteed protections, including freedom from discrimination based on race and national origin and from arbitrary treatment by the government. Yet, because both legal and illegal migrants typically face language barriers, are in precarious financial straits, lack access to legal assistance, and possibly fear reprisals, they tend not to assert their internationally and nationally established rights.

- 5: The approximate percentage, smaller than popularly assumed, of illegal immigrants in the current civilian US workforce (some 7.2 of 148 million workers), most of whom, though annually contributing more than \$1 trillion to the US economy even while confined to largely “unskilled” jobs, are paid substandard wages, lack adequate health care, are subject to abuse and exploitation by employers, and otherwise are denied labor protections (ACLU, 2000; Pew Hispanic Center, 2005; Equal Justice Center, 2006; NY Press, 2006; Rapid Immigration, 2006)
- 25: Approximate percentage of Hurricane Katrina recovery workers actively recruited from among undocumented immigrants by major US companies under multi-million dollar government contracts to assist the New Orleans clean-up and recovery efforts, companies that make little to no effort to mitigate working conditions that are often harmful and, in some cases, deny pay and threaten deportation if workers attempt to assert their rights to compensation and to reasonably healthy and safe work environments (AFL-CIO, 2006; Democracy Now, 2006)
- 90: Estimated percentage of US-detained immigrants who appear without legal counsel in their immigration proceedings largely because they are entitled to counsel only if it is “at no expense to the government,” that is, only if they pay for it, imperiling their right to equality before, and equal protection of, the law (Immigration Equality, 2005; ABA Commission on Immigration, 2006)

- 1,800:** Minimum number of immigrants currently detained by federal law in the US Midwest, without regard for the capacity of local jails to provide standards of care set by the international community, including the separation of immigrants from criminals, space for exercise, advice about one's rights in a language one understands, and adequate opportunity to communicate with legal counsel and family members (Justice for Our Neighbors, 2005; Human Rights Watch, 1998, 2006; American Bar Association Commission on Immigration, 2006)
- 2,000:** Number of miles of US–Mexican border wall authorized by the US Congress to stem illegal immigration which, though not a human rights violation for lack of any right to unrestricted migration, does suggest the Berlin Wall and the wall recently erected between Israel and the adjacent Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories, tending to define the United States as a gated community that denies the spirit of human rights by emphasizing the gross disparity of means and privilege of some human beings over others (*The Guardian*, 2006; New America Media, 2006; *New York Times*, 2006)
- 5,000:** Estimated number of unaccompanied immigrant minors detained yearly by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, often in dangerous circumstances and in common jails, contravening the international duty to act “in the best interest of the child” and to treat children separated from their parents in a positive, humane, and expeditious manner (Human Rights Watch, 2000; The American Immigration Law Foundation, 2004)
- 40,000:** Estimated number of US citizens with foreign gay or lesbian partners who, because the 1996 US Defense of Marriage Act declares “marriage” to mean, in all federal law, “only a legal union between one man and one woman” and thus to exclude same-sex couples for immigration purposes, are forced to leave the United States or live apart from their loved ones, depriving the foreign partner of her or his right to freedom of movement and the right of each to freedom from discrimination based on sexual orientation (Human Rights Watch, 2006)
- 150,000:** Number of immigrants granted asylum in the United States who, in 2004, brought a successful class action against the US Immigration and Naturalization Service—now the US Department of Homeland Security's Citizenship and Immigration Services—for its failure, through mismanagement, to convert nearly 22,000 immigrants granted asylum into “permanent residents,” extending the waiting time of all asylum seekers by more than two years, a consequence found “widespread” by the presiding federal judge and prompting him to condemn the former INS for “egregious” and “plainly harmful” violations of law that “constitute nothing short of a national embarrassment” (American Immigration Law Foundation, 2004)

**Copyright © 2007 by the University of Iowa Center for Human Rights (UICHR). For additional facts concerning US immigration, source details, and further information on human rights generally, please visit the UICHR web site: www.uichr.org.*