

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 1, 2013

Contact: Manar Waheed
(301) 270-1855
manar@saalt.org

South Asian Organizations Call for Just and Humane Reform of Immigration System

With the release of the principles from a bipartisan group of senators and President Obama's immigration plan this week, momentum is building towards immigration reform. The [National Coalition of South Asian Organizations \(NCSO\)](#), a coalition of 41 groups around the United States, works closely with South Asian immigrants, including aspiring citizens. We look forward to offering our input and recommendations as the policy process moves forward in the upcoming months.

South Asian Americans are the fastest growing major ethnic group in the United States, increasing by 78% from 2000 to 2010 to approximately 3.4 million people. Our community is made up of undocumented immigrants, dependent and temporary workers on various visas, refugees and asylum-seekers, lawful permanent residents, and United States citizens. According to the Department of Homeland Security, there were approximately 240,000 undocumented Indians alone in 2011, making India the seventh highest country of origin for undocumented people in the United States. Additionally, South Asians, especially those from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, are often separated from their families for years at a time as a result of the family and employment visa backlogs.

Members of the NCSO offer the following remarks that touch upon the various experiences of South Asian immigrants, and principles around immigration policy reform.

“This week's announcements from lawmakers and President Obama have given us hope for the future of South Asian Americans and all immigrants in our nation. We urge the Administration and Congress to continue to work together and pass immigration policy reform that unites our families, provides us with options towards obtaining visas and citizenship, and ends unjust enforcement measures that have affected so many of our community members, especially in the past decade. Only then will we have a system that is just and humane for South Asian Americans, all immigrants, and society as a whole.”

Deepa Iyer, Executive Director
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)

“Last year, a Desis Rising Up and Moving member's husband was arrested by local law enforcement on false charges as often happens to immigrants working in low-wage jobs such as cab drivers, street vendors, laborers, and retail workers. Though her husband's criminal case was later dismissed, he was already in removal proceedings as a result of the Secure Communities program. His wife struggles to take care of their two children on her own, particularly because she cannot work. Comprehensive immigration reform must terminate enforcement programs that engage in profiling so that families like this one are not unjustly targeted.”

Monami Maulik, Founder & Executive Director
Desis Rising Up & Moving (DRUM)

“We are frequently contacted by South Asian Americans whose lives are on hold as a result of our current immigration system. Recently, we worked with an elderly couple from India who have been waiting over seven years to be reunited with their adult son and his family; a community member waiting to reunite with his sister and her family for over fifteen years; and, a

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 1, 2013

Contact: Manar Waheed
(301) 270-1855
manar@saalt.org

young graduate student and his siblings who remain undocumented. We sincerely hope that immigration reform will address these backlogs that divide our families and provide a pathway to citizenship for our undocumented community members, so that we may all begin to move forward with our lives.”

Manjusha Kulkarni, Executive Director
South Asian Network (SAN)

“We recently worked with a man from India who left his friends, traditions, and home behind when he came here to be with his daughter, son-in-law, and two grandchildren. He took English classes to minimize the language barrier with his grandchildren and his interactions in society and joined our Seniors’ Program to further develop his life in the United States. At the Indo-American Center, we believe that programs that assist with the integration of immigrants into American society are essential aspects of immigration policy change.”

Jay Luthra, Executive Director
Indo-American Center

The NCSO firmly believes in the creation of just and human immigration reform that embodies the following principles:

- Creates accessible and affordable pathways to legalization and citizenship for all undocumented individuals;
- Keeps families together, eliminates the visa backlogs, and increases caps for family and employment visas;
- Creates legislation that provides equal immigration benefits and protections to and prohibits discrimination against same-sex couples;
- Provides avenues and protections for immigrant workers and their families;
- Rejects enforcement-only approaches to immigration and terminates racial and religious profiling;
- Ensures due process and human rights standards for immigrants including within the detention and deportation system;
- Standardizes asylum adjudications and provides support to resettled refugees;
- Creates policies that support the empowerment of women, including victims of domestic violence and trafficking;
- Provides access to services and benefits, including health care, regardless of immigration status; and,
- Promotes support for integration programs, including English as a Second Language, and naturalization.

We urge the Administration and Congress to thoroughly address these principles in the enactment of immigration reform, so that we may create a system that is just and humane for all Americans.

The [National Coalition of South Asian Organizations \(NCSO\)](#), a network of 41 organizations that serve, organize, and advocate on behalf of the South Asian community, is coordinated by [South Asian Americans Leading Together \(SAALT\)](#). Learn more about the NCSO and SAALT at www.saalt.org.