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06/18/07 - Posted from the Daily Record newsroom

Day laborers' plea: Stop the raids

Immigrants, supporters from N.J., N.Y. gather in Morristown

BY MATT MANOCHIO
DAILY RECORD

MORRISTOWN -- More than 30 day laborers gathered Sunday at the Morristown train station demanding raids on illegal immigrants cease, and that any national legislation include a provision for family reunification.

"We, the day laborers, are working people," Morristown resident Erick Carreto, 26, a community organizer for the Wind of the Spirit immigrant resource center, said through an interpreter.

"Are what we're looking to do is work with honor and to be treated with dignity and respect," he said, later adding that repression against them must end.

"We are working and humble people," he said. "We are not committing crimes."

Sunday's brief news conference was part of the third annual New York/New Jersey conference of day laborers, sponsored by the National Day Labor Organizing Network.

Day laborers from municipalities in New York and Connecticut gathered to voice their requests for pending immigration legislation being discussed in congress.

Diana Mejia, also of Wind of the Spirit, said day laborers wanted to speak in Morristown because of Mayor Donald Cresitello's plan to deputize local police officers to enforce immigration law.

Not only were the various day laboring organizations against this idea, but also vocally opposed raids designed to round up illegal immigrants.

"The raids are destroying families, they are destroying communities," Saul Linares, 28, of Hempstead, N.Y., said through an interpreter.

"We want to ask (authorities) to completely stop the raids in our communities," he said.

Many of the day laborers and their advocates also said that any immigration law coming out of Washington, D.C., must include a provision for family reunification.

Ramiro Huinil, 23, of Morristown, said he came to America from Guatemala two years ago.

Huinil said he wants police raids to stop, and also said that local police also can be harassing because their presence around where day laborers gather tends to ward off the contractors who hire them.

When asked if he understood the argument that many Americans want to see existing immigration laws enforced and the border strengthened before any new legislation is enacted, Huinil responded, through interpreter Chris Newman, "We're legal. We may not have papers. We're workers, but we have rights as people and as workers. We're doing jobs because they're offered to us, and it's hard work."

The group of day laborers then congregated at the Shepard School to discuss different ways to get out their message and coordinate between likeminded groups throughout the United States.

One proposal under the immigration legislation requires illegal aliens to pay a \$5,000 fee in order to get permanent legal residency after eight years, according to published reports. The head of the household must temporarily return once to their home country, too.

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Diana Mejia with the American Friends Services Committee speaks at the news conference at the Day Laborer Summit held in Morristown on Sunday.

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Erick Carreto of Morristown a community organizer for the Wind of the Spirit immigrant resource center said immigrants are looking to work with honor and to be treated with dignity and respect.

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Carreto, a community organizer for wind of the spirit, said he felt the fee was too much.

"I think it's a little bit high," he said. "I think \$2,000, people can handle that."

He also said it's unrealistic to think that people would automatically leave the country to then come back to the United States.

"It's hard," he said. "Who can promise you that they're going to come back?"

He also was asked if he'd like to see the border more rigorously enforced before more people are allowed into the country.

"I don't think so," he said. "That's not going to work. People are going to find other ways to come here."

As for the illegal immigrants already in the country who decide not to pay any fee or take part in the program, Carreto said "it's going to be hard for them to find a job" because employers would likely hire participants in the plan rather than those who disregard it.

"They might go back (to their home country) on their own," Carreto said.

Carreto said he knows the opposing arguments to the legislation.

"I understand the point of view, but they forget they're all immigrants," Carreto said.

Should the legislation be signed into law, Carreto said the government should know who's in the country.

"The should know who's here," he said. "They should give them opportunities."

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