



LCLAA

LABOR COUNCIL FOR LATIN AMERICAN ADVANCEMENT

For Immediate Release

June 30, 2008

Contact: Silvana Quiroz

202-508-6917

**LCLAA Concerned with the Drastic Increase of Incarceration and Criminalization of Undocumented Migrants:
*Immigration Offenders Are the Third Largest Group in Federal Jails***

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The drastic increase of incarceration rates of undocumented immigrants is a clear indication of the abusive anti-immigrant policies that have been instituted over the past few years. Records obtained by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) illustrate that immigration prosecutions for March 2008 rose to 9,350 - a 50 percent increase from the previous month and a 73 percent increase from the previous year. The government also reported 8,104 new immigration convictions - a 24.4 increase from the previous month. The greatest number of immigration convictions is occurring in states with large Latino populations. Inmates incarcerated in federal prisons for immigration related offenses now represent the third largest group in our jails.

Violation of immigration law is a civil offense requiring prosecution by an immigration judge. However, current efforts by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) criminalize immigrants and ultimately seek their permanent exclusion. By criminalizing immigrants over these civil offenses, they become ineligible for legalization processes in the future.

It has been well reported that the mass detention of immigrants resulting from immigration raids conducted by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have led to human rights abuses and neglect once detained. The recent Washington Post series on “Careless Detention” underscored the deplorable treatment of immigrant detainees and the deprivation of access to adequate medical care. Jorge Bustamante, Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants for the United Nations, noted in a March 2008 report that policies towards migrants, legal or unauthorized, violate international human rights agreements.

As an organization that advocates for working families and the respect of the human, civil and worker rights of Latinos in the United States and abroad, the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA) is extremely concerned about the implications that higher incarceration rates of immigrants will have on the overall Latino community and its image in the eyes of the American public. LCLAA is particularly concerned that current policy feeds into the myth that immigrants are criminals when studies have consistently demonstrated that until recently, immigrants held the lowest incarceration rates of all groups. Anti-immigrant and anti-Latino sentiments have increased dramatically in recent years, as denoted by a recent FBI report demonstrating that Latinos represent over 60 percent of victims of hate crimes in the nation.

“We need to respect the basic rights of workers regardless of their status. Undocumented workers have been exploited for decades. The criminalization and incarceration of immigrants because of their legal status is not the correct answer. Workers need opportunities in their own country so that they are not forced to leave their homeland out of economic desperation. Economic policies that benefit only a small portion of the population are not an adequate and sustainable way forward for this region,” said Dr. Gabriela Lemus, Executive Director of LCLAA.

“The economic policies of the last two decades have been harmful to workers throughout the hemisphere causing dislocation and displacement, resulting in migration. We need to address the root causes of migration and understand that this is a regional problem that requires a combination of both domestic policy as well as comprehensive, humane and commonsense international solutions. Undocumented workers are a voiceless group of people who live in fear and today they are much more exploitable. The administration’s current policies and the criminalization of this group of people only exacerbate this situation. Immigrants are not criminals,” said Milton Rosado, LCLAA’s National President.

The Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, LCLAA, is the home of the Latino Labor Movement. LCLAA is a national Latino organization representing the interests of over 1.7 million Latino trade unionists throughout the country and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. LCLAA was founded in 1973 and is America’s premiere national organization for Latino workers and their families. LCLAA advocates for the rights of all workers seeking justice in the workplace and their communities. LCLAA is a constituency group representing Latino workers in both the AFL-CIO and Change to Win Federation.

###