

Ongoing Inhumane Treatment of Immigrants, International Students and U.S. Citizens Tallahassee Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

It is a short news cycle. The deportation of human beings from our country risks being crowded off the front pages by other events. But it is an urgent and critical issue that is being enforced in ways that violate our democratic values. It can neither be ignored nor allowed to become the new normal. Tallahassee Friends (Quaker) Meeting condemns the ongoing persecution of immigrants by the Government of the United States through radical policy changes enacted by the current administration. They target not only undocumented immigrants with criminal records but all undocumented people. Many who have been given permission to live, work, and be educated here, people who have been promised a safe haven, and U.S. citizens have been caught in the deportation nightmare. We object to the continued denial of due process for those who have been detained, and to the intimidation of and militarized response to those speaking out. We wonder who will be next.

Comparing the welcome given to White Afrikaners allegedly seeking asylum with the mass arrests of workers from Central and South America, Mexico, and elsewhere who have been contributing to our society and our economy for years reveals uncomfortable truths. Families of people of color are being torn apart and deprived of their livelihoods. This is egregious, racist behavior that has no place in our country. ICE and its allies are terrorizing our communities.

We see this fear in our hometown of Tallahassee. Masked agents enter worksites and “disappear” fathers, brothers, sons, and other members of our Hispanic communities without due process or even informing their loved ones where they are. We see fear as ICE masks frighten children who have become isolated in their homes, both afraid to play outside and afraid of coming home to find their parents gone. Parents worry about running errands or sending their children to school. We see this fear as the State of Florida builds a detention camp for alleged immigrant criminals – many of whom have committed no crime – in a protected Everglades ecosystem sacred to Native Americans. We see it on our campuses as deportation threats promote a culture of fear among immigrant and international members of our academic communities. We watch in disbelief as some of our elected leaders cruelly and callously use immigrant misery as a background for political photo-ops.

Quakers’ experience and foundational belief is that there is that of God, the sacred, or inherent worth in every human being. It follows that everyone deserves to be treated with compassion and respect regardless of their birthplace or citizenship status. The Jewish Bible and the Christian New Testament both teach as a central and essential message that “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The Quran tells us to “Be good...to the poor, and to a neighbor, whether kinsman or new-comer, and to a fellow traveler, and to the wayfarer.” The Hindu Mahabharata

states, "This is the sum of duty; do naught unto others which would cause pain unto you." While religions differ in how they state their ideas, there is a common belief among them and among many people who claim no religion: Honor the dignity of each person.

Cruelty has no place in any society. Our Tallahassee community is richer for its diversity. We pray that our leaders will listen to the voice of conscience and acknowledge our common humanity as they make policy that will shape the future of our beloved country.