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Esperanza for America Inaugurates African American, Hispanic Coalition for Immigration Reform

Reject Claims of 'Black-Brown' Immigration Divide

The Reverend Cortes, Jr. and The Reverend Derrick Harkins, along with other prominent African American and Hispanic pastors yesterday announced a first-of-its kind coalition to demonstrate that immigration reform has broad support across racial and ethnic lines. As President Obama prepares to deliver a major speech on immigration today, the faith leaders strongly rejected claims of a “black-brown” divide on an issue that has received growing attention since the Arizona legislature passed a punitive immigration law in April. The Reverend Cortes, Jr. and other leaders from Esperanza for America on the call were invited to join President Obama in Washington, D.C. for his speech to the Nation.

The coalition includes Esperanza for America, our national grassroots campaign to support comprehensive immigration reform, and clergy representing the several of the largest African American denominations. –the National Baptist Convention, USA; the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Progressive National Baptist Convention. Faith leaders announced in the press call that they have sent a letter to President Obama that describes any supposed tension between African American and Hispanic communities over immigration as “a divisive tactic, used to prevent the possibility of true transformation in our system.” A copy of the letter can be found [here](#).

The coalition will actively recruit clergy, plan joint education programs that bring together African American and Hispanic congregations and look for opportunities to engage Members of Congress. Leaders of the coalition stressed moral and practical arguments for comprehensive immigration reform that includes policies that keep children and parents together and honestly addresses the issue of 12 million undocumented immigrants who are already living in this country and ensuring that they register with the government, pay taxes and learn English.

“I am humbled that we are able to bring together this coalition of African American and Hispanic clergy to support immigration reform,” said **Rev. Luis Cortes, Jr.**, President of **Esperanza** and co-convener of the coalition. “As faith leaders, we are called to care for the poor and welcome the stranger. We honor the principles of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and so many others who fought for justice by proclaiming that God gave all people human dignity and value regardless of race or position in life.”

“We have come together to dispel the ugly myths about a black and brown divide on immigration reform,” said **Derrick Harkins**, Senior Pastor of the **Nineteenth Street Baptist Church** in Washington, DC and co-convener of the coalition. “Throughout our history, immigrants have strengthened our country with their hard work and commitment to core American values. Immigrants are not taking our jobs or public resources. The reality is that we are unified across ethnic and racial lines. We will not waver as we pursue justice on this human rights issue of our day.”

Rev. Gabriel Salguero, Senior Pastor at **Lamb’s Church in New York City**, called the new coalition a powerful sign that any efforts to derail comprehensive immigration reform by pitting African Americans and Latinos against each other would fail.

“The days of divide and conquer are over,” said Salguero, the Director of the Hispanic Leadership Program at Princeton Theological Seminary. “Black and brown people of faith will not be divided. This national coalition of African American and Hispanic clergy is proof positive that immigration reform is an issue on which we will stand together. What unites is greater than anything that can divide us.”

A [poll](#) released this spring by Public Religion Research Institute, a nonpartisan organization, found broad support for comprehensive immigration reform that crosses religious and political lines.

“In this dark period in our nation’s history, as people of God we are obligated to shine the light of God’s justice on our immigration system,” said **Rev. Harvey Clemons**, Pastor of the **Pleasant Hill Baptist Church in Houston** and President of the Houston Coalition for Immigration Reform.

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Esperanza is one of the largest Hispanic faith-based networks in the country. With a national network of over 12,000 Hispanic congregations, faith and community based agencies, Esperanza is a leading voice for Hispanics in America. Esperanza for America is a national grassroots immigration campaign.