STATEMENT ON THE ENDING OF DACA

UCLA, September 8, 2017 — The UCLA Center for the Study of International Migration joins UC President Napolitano and UCLA Chancellor Block in condemning President Trump’s cruel decision to rescind the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. We endorse the university’s efforts to support and protect DACA students in all possible ways and join our academic leaders in urging Congress to swiftly pass legislation that will enable DACA recipients to pursue their lives, careers, and studies with the stability and confidence that they deserve.

In deploiring President Trump’s malicious decision, we, along with our university leaders, students, and fellow members of the faculty, stand in solidarity with the threatened members of the UCLA, UC, and broader California communities. As a unit devoted to research and teaching on international migration, it is also our job to explain how and why our country has found itself at this impasse:

The answer is a truth that dare not speak its name: contrary to the claims of elected officials and policymakers, acceptance of undocumented migration, not its prevention, has long been the tacit U.S. immigration policy. Today’s globalized economy depends on workers sourced from around the world; yet the demand for immigrant labor exceeds the levels of permanent migration that U.S. citizens are prepared to tolerate. To reconcile the conflicting pressures of business demand for immigrant labor with opposition to immigration our government has tolerated the presence of unauthorized immigrant workers while pretending otherwise. Though this act of hypocrisy has worked well for employers and for some U.S. citizens, it has come with a deep cost to undocumented immigrants and their families.

In wanting workers, our country also received people arriving with spouses, partners, children, and parents, all of whom simply moved to the United States for a better life. With time, the pursuit of that better life turned undocumented immigrants into members of our neighborhoods, campuses, workplaces, and the society at large. Most Americans – though not the leaders running Washington – understand what that transformation implies: in putting down roots and committing for the long term undocumented immigrants have also become de facto Americans. Majorities of Americans recognize that undocumented immigrants are not just living in the United States, but are also of it, which is why they favor inclusion, not exclusion, consistently supporting legislation that would give undocumented immigrants permanent legal resident status, setting them on the road to citizenship.

The advent of DACA was a first, modest, all too tentative, step in that better direction. In furnishing protection to less than 1 out of every 10 undocumented immigrants, it provided only a partial correction to a larger injustice and in that sense was not fully fair. And yet President Obama, with the support of the broad community of immigrant advocates, opted for this partial correction with good reason, as children born abroad, but raised in the United States, have all grown up as Americans. Indeed, since primary and secondary education is a right enjoyed by all children living in the United States, regardless of legal status, our school systems taught
undocumented children to think of themselves as Americans, having the same obligations as other Americans but also warranting the same rights.

The protections granted by DACA never fully provided the rights that undocumented child arrivals so clearly deserve. Its exacting criteria left a significant number of childhood arrivals vulnerable and out in the cold; DACA also made demands on its beneficiaries, requiring them to provide information about themselves and their families to a government that would not deliver a permanent resolution to their problems. Despite these shortcomings, DACA nonetheless made a bad situation significantly better, rendering the immigration system less irrational and immigration enforcement more transparent at a time when Congress would not act. It also sent a powerful, encouraging message: American society was beginning to realize that undocumented, but everyday Americans could no longer be made to suffer the costs of a cruel, hypocritical immigration policy.

Of course, facing the truth is always difficult; a policy based on smoke and mirrors – pretending to oppose undocumented immigration while tacitly accepting its reality – still generates political dividends. But the evidence indicates that the majority of Americans, understanding that undocumented residents are full members of our communities, are ready for policies that will break with the past: undocumented de facto citizens deserve de jure citizenship. Restoring the rights revoked by President Trump’s unacceptable rescission of DACA is the first, imperative step needed to move this country back towards that better road. However, Congress should also go beyond DACA’s scope, providing protection for an additional one million undocumented persons, who also arrived during childhood, but have not been able to benefit from DACA. Looking still further towards the future, the millions of undocumented immigrants who arrived as adults deserve to know that their lives in America are secure, which is why the country needs to put them on a path towards legalization.

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