

# A Briefing of the First San Francisco Summit on Immigrant Rights, 2002



San Francisco  
Immigrant  
Rights  
Commission

Un Informe de la Primera Cumbre de San Francisco en las Derechas Inmigrantes  
第一屆三藩市移民權益高峰會議簡報

By the Honorable Commissioner Diana Lau, Chair of the San Francisco Immigrant Rights Summit and Chair of the San Francisco Immigrant Rights Commission (06/2001—12/2002)

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In its mission to improve the quality of life for local immigrants, the San Francisco Immigrant Rights Commission (IRC) reached a milestone in September 2002, sponsoring the first San Francisco Summit on Immigrant Rights. The ambitious goal of this ground-breaking event was to raise the level of local as well as national awareness about this underserved multi-ethnic sector, and to create a coordinated response to meet their needs. To achieve its aim, the Commission brought together members of the immigrant constituency and representatives from a broad range of government agencies and community-based organizations. Most of the Summit attendees had experience or expertise related to serving the immigrant population.

Comprising roughly 27%<sup>1</sup> of San Francisco's population, immigrants have played a significant role in developing this city's economy as well as its rich and renowned cultural fabric. Praises aside, let us not be misled by the model minority

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myth. Many immigrants have, and will continue to struggle with scapegoating, discrimination, assimilation, identity, and the challenges of mere survival in an unfamiliar society.

Recent events, including Operation Iraqi Freedom and the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) outbreak, have cast a pall on an already marginalized community whose members continue to experience the repercussions of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack. While these tragedies hold grave physical, psychological, and economic implications for us all, immigrants suffer most acutely.

Additionally, in step with the changes affecting the community at-large, issues specific to our immigrant community continue to grow in complexity and number. The budgetary and job cuts induced by the economic downturn have serious repercussions on many

immigrant service programs, and although a significant, limited amount of quality help is still available, the reduction or elimination of these programs will inevitably impact the most needy.

Another important goal of the conference was to create the groundwork

for a strategic plan to address many of the top issues facing immigrants. Summit organizers channeled the issues into ten workgroups to address the following community service areas: civil rights; economic development; education; health, aging and veterans; housing and shelter; jobs and employment; language access; naturalization; political participation; and youth and families. The commission invited a panel of experts in each of these areas to facilitate discussions with the workgroups. Issues were examined from multiple perspectives, and participants, who represented the private, non-profit, and government sectors, worked in partnership to define key issues and recommend solutions in each area.

**FULL SUMMIT REPORT AVAILABLE:**

**ELECTRONIC COPY:** Go to [www.sfimmigrantsummit.org](http://www.sfimmigrantsummit.org) or [www.sfgov.org/immigrant](http://www.sfgov.org/immigrant)

**HARD COPY:** Contact Winny Loi, Commission Secretary (415) 554-4789

<sup>1</sup> According to the U.S. Census 2000 data

## The Ten Workgroup/Panel Discussions

The following notes are highlights of the workgroup discussion sessions. We encourage readers to examine the full report available on the websites <[www.sfimmigrantsummit.org](http://www.sfimmigrantsummit.org)> or <[www.sfgov.org/immigrant](http://www.sfgov.org/immigrant)>, or you may request a hard copy from the Commission.

Areas	Key Issues	Suggested Solutions
<b>Civil Rights</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in discrimination and racial profiling of immigrants</li> <li>• Under-reporting of hate crimes</li> <li>• Unfair government policies and practices targeting immigrants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reaffirm San Francisco as a “City of Refuge”</li> <li>• Address problems with assertive advocacy</li> <li>• Collaborate among government and community service agencies working with immigrant groups</li> <li>• Conduct cultural sensitivity training for the San Francisco Police Department and airport employees</li> <li>• Communicate a clear stand against the Patriot Act in addition to hate crimes</li> </ul>
<b>Economic Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication gaps in jobs, vocational training, loan opportunities and the application processes</li> <li>• Non-recognition of foreign credentials or degrees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethnic media to publicize job programs and loans</li> <li>• Facilitate recognition of foreign credentials</li> <li>• Online access to new and existing economic opportunities and more job training</li> <li>• Develop more business loan programs for immigrants</li> </ul>
<b>Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of sufficient translated materials and bilingual staff at school sites</li> <li>• Need for more ESL and vocational programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form a collaborative approach with the San Francisco Unified School District, San Francisco City College, and the immigrant community</li> <li>• Use bilingual staff, translators or student volunteers</li> <li>• Develop a central resource office</li> <li>• Make available more language-appropriate information pamphlets</li> <li>• Encourage more ethnic media reporting</li> </ul>
<b>Health, Aging and Immigrant Veterans</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delay, denial and reluctance in seeking medical treatment</li> <li>• Fear of being reported to the INS (undocumented individuals)</li> <li>• Complex network of healthcare systems difficult to navigate</li> <li>• Lack of healthcare insurance</li> <li>• Language and cultural barriers</li> <li>• Low income levels</li> <li>• Poor living conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create more culturally-sensitive and language-appropriate healthcare programs and informational materials</li> <li>• Build a stronger coalition among the community-based organizations</li> <li>• Publish report cards</li> <li>• Extend Health Department’s hours of operation</li> </ul>
<b>Housing and Shelter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for more housing subsidies</li> <li>• Need for childcare, healthcare, increased security and other programs within the public housing environments</li> <li>• Need for more translated information, bilingual staff, and ethnic media outreach</li> <li>• Need for improving substandard living conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build a Public Interest Partnership (PIP)</li> <li>• Hire more bilingual staff</li> <li>• Have available more language-appropriate information and forms</li> <li>• Train staff in language and cultural sensitivity</li> <li>• Enforce housing standards</li> <li>• Seek more federal and state money</li> </ul>

<p><b>Jobs and Employment</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unemployment is at an all-time high</li> <li>• Lack of language and vocational skills</li> <li>• Unfair employment situations</li> <li>• Inadequate job training and access</li> <li>• “Glass ceiling” effect</li> <li>• Harsh, substandard, and unsafe work conditions</li> <li>• Fear of repercussions from employers</li> <li>• Fear of deportation by the INS</li> <li>• A general lack of knowledge of labor laws on the part of both employers and employees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase English proficiency resources</li> <li>• Secure resources to create more jobs</li> <li>• Develop more training programs for new vocational skills</li> <li>• Educate workforce regarding labor laws</li> <li>• Make timely adjustment to the living wage laws</li> </ul>
<p><b>Language Access</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct research to identify specific gaps in services that result from poor language access</li> <li>• Insufficient bilingual staff, translation services and information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enforce the Equal Access to Services Ordinance adopted in June 2000</li> <li>• Encourage immigrants to learn English</li> <li>• Establish an Immigrants’ Central Information Office as a one-stop shop for translation services and other assistance</li> <li>• Educate existing customer service staff in language and cultural sensitivity</li> <li>• Use bilingual college students as translators</li> </ul>
<p><b>Naturalization</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General lack of knowledge of INS functioning</li> <li>• Misconceptions and fears</li> <li>• Escalating fees for naturalization application</li> <li>• LGBT community’s inability to renew foreign partners’ legal visitor status coupled with the inability to legally marry forces couples to separate or go underground</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase citizenship preparation classes</li> <li>• Educate immigrants on INS functioning and dispel unfounded fears</li> <li>• Create loan programs to assist with the high INS application fees</li> <li>• Increase legal counseling and resources regarding the LGBT domestic partnership issues</li> </ul>
<p><b>Political Participation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of a good grasp of the structure and functioning of the American political and government systems</li> <li>• Not clear about obligations and voting rights as U.S. citizens</li> <li>• Political apathy and low voter registration and turnout</li> <li>• Need for more advocacy for immigrant groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultivate more leadership from within the group</li> <li>• Develop language-appropriate classes and handouts such as government resources guides, tours, meetings, etc.</li> <li>• Ethnic media to deliver critical information and education in their own languages</li> <li>• College student volunteers to teach immigrant classes in return for college credits</li> </ul>
<p><b>Youth and Family</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to support and expand community-based agencies that serve immigrant youth and families</li> <li>• Need more prioritized government as well as private funding</li> <li>• Communication, language and cultural barriers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form collaborative effort between the government and the community-based organizations</li> <li>• Use neighborhood meetings as a good outreach method</li> <li>• Support childcare services, counseling and education</li> </ul>

**Summary**

Most residents of our country, with the notable exception of Native Americans, are immigrants or descendants of immigrants. Keeping our past ancestors in mind and empathizing with the new immigrants assisting them to adjust, adapt and acculturate in a new environment will help them minimize their hardships. It is

also in San Francisco’s best interest to assist them to become productive citizens as quickly as possible.

This Summit provided the workgroups that not only successfully identified and assessed key issues facing immigrants, but also formulated corresponding pragmatic solutions. The workgroups’ accomplishments, however, were

merely part of a continuum that, hopefully, will lead to implementation of some, if not all, of the proposed solutions.

Working together to enhance existing and future programs and streamlining internal operations are ways for the non-profit organizations and government agencies to stay sol-

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### In Partnership Today for a Brighter Tomorrow

We're on the Web!  
[www.sfimmigrantsummit.org](http://www.sfimmigrantsummit.org) or  
[www.sfgov.org/immigrant](http://www.sfgov.org/immigrant)

vent, especially during these tight economic times under a generally anti-immigrant atmosphere.

The Summit participants also highlighted the emotional disengagement, social apathy, and the "us" versus "them" mentality at work in our society. The Commission firmly believes that changing fundamental attitudes towards our immigrant community to a more positive demeanor is of paramount importance, as that will help steer decision makers to distribute the available funding and resources more equitably and enable us to live in harmony.

We hope that this Briefing can inspire you to read the full report and to take action.

We also hope that the Summit report will not just sit around as a passive archive, but that it will serve as an active roadmap for more future work on behalf of the immigrant community.

Hence, we need your voluntary efforts now more than ever before and we urge you to actively support our work in all ways possible.

In partnership, we can maintain San Francisco as a truly welcoming city, a "City and County of Refuge" (Ord. # 375-89, 1989), for immigrants.

We welcome your comments and suggestions regarding the Summit and the Summit report.

### 2002 IRC Community Service Award Honorees

- **The African Immigrant & Refugee Resource Center**
- **The Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee**
- **CARECEN (Central American Resource Center)**
- **Émigré Services Program of Jewish Family and Children's Services**
- **The Filipino Airport Screeners and Union Local 790**
- **Housing Services of Asian Law Caucus**
- **Love Sees No Borders of the National Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights Organization**

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