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## Fight over rights

By Tom Lochner  
CONTRA COSTA TIMES

Several hundred immigrants and their supporters on Sunday denounced a recent wave of arrests and deportations of immigrants in the East Bay as a violation of basic human rights. .

"I do not want our ... residents to live under terror," said Richmond Mayor Gayle McLaughlin. That is how "hundreds of thousands of families" have lived, she said, since Immigration and Customs Enforcement began a nationwide push in immigrant communities, including Richmond, San Pablo and Concord.

The National Fugitive Operations Program targets immigrants with deportation orders, especially those who have committed crimes, ICE spokeswoman Lori Haley has said.

Church leaders and immigrant advocacy groups say ICE violates its own hunting rules by rounding up and swiftly deporting people not on the list. They complain that ICE trawls for immigrants near schools and Latino markets. Haley said agents have the discretion to check out people not on the ICE list.

Critics also complain about ICE agents' use of the word "police" to gain access to homes, saying it undermines immigrants' trust in local police. Haley defended the practice, saying ICE agents are federal police.

McLaughlin spoke at an immigration forum at St. Mark Catholic Church hosted by Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization. Other speakers included Richmond council members Ludmyrna Lopez, John Marquez and Tony Thurmond; San Pablo council members Genoveva Garcia Calloway and Leonard McNeil; Pinole Mayor Maria Alegria; West Contra Costa schools official Kaye Burnside; Barbara Johnson, an aide to Rep. George Miller, D-Martinez; lawyer Mark Silverman; and the Rev. Ramiro Flores, St. Mark's pastor, who prayed for respect for immigrants' dignity.

Several people testified about encounters with ICE, among them Maria "Chuy" Ramos, whose daughter, 17, and son, 21, were arrested at home by ICE agents ostensibly targeting someone else. Ramos, whose children's plight was recently reported in the Times, said immigrants who do work no one else wants to do should not be denied human rights.

"For whom are the rights?" she asked. "For those who have the money? For those who have the power?"

Patricia Cadena said armed people shouting "police" took away her brother, niece, two nephews and a family friend from their San Pablo apartment Dec. 18. The niece, 17-year-old Richmond High School senior Montserrat Cadena, was eventually released and is seeking permission to stay in the country to complete her studies, her aunt said.

The others -- Jesus Cadena; his sons Hugo, 28, and Jesus Jr., 27; and another man she knows only as Rogelio -- were deported to Mexico two weeks later, Patricia Cadena said.

"They didn't take the mom because she had just left for work," she said.

Her story resembles others around the East Bay, but with a twist: The officers who shouted "police" were just that, San Pablo police officers, according to Cadena.

No San Pablo police official could be reached for comment late Sunday.

Cadena said there previously had been some kind of dispute between her brother's family and some neighbors, and she thinks that is what brought police to the apartment. The four men were taken to County Jail in Martinez but were never charged with any crime, Cadena said, and ICE eventually stepped in.

Details of Cadena's story could not be verified Sunday.

McNeil said he does not know if San Pablo has a policy similar to Richmond's that bars local police from acting in tandem with ICE in most cases, but that if not, he would work toward one.

Immigration is a sensitive topic in San Pablo, where Mayor Paul Morris takes a tough stand on illegal immigration. In the campaign leading to his re-election to the council in November, Morris said illegal immigration is among the most serious problems facing the nation and that San Pablo police should enforce federal immigration laws.

McNeil took the historical perspective, thanking Mexicans for opposing a spread of slavery to their country, which he cited as an issue in the Mexican-American War of 1846-48. And during the 1930s, he noted, 2 million Mexicans were rounded up and deported, "much as is happening now."

McLaughlin blamed American economic and military policies for "a fair share" of the poverty and war in the world. "Our government shares in the responsibility for the forced migration for survival that has brought so many people here."

Richmond council members said they would introduce a resolution on Feb. 6 for the city to write a letter to federal authorities seeking an end to ICE's current operation and its methods.

McNeil and Calloway urged residents to pressure the San Pablo council to do likewise, and Pinole's Alegria said, "This is a struggle for basic human rights."

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