

# Undocumented Immigrant Says Amnesty Essential

- By Ramón Bannister

The previous stories in this series focused on the Minute Man Project. Now we will hear from an undocumented immigrant who is not shy about sharing her name. She is Angela Perez, a woman who has been in the United States for more than ten years. As we spoke, she prepared bags of food at the Tucson Soup kitchen run by Brian Flag – food that would go to families living in poverty. Later, we will also hear from a Mexican police officer with whom I spoke across the border in Naco, Mexico.

## Interview With Angela Perez

RB – Why did you come to the United States?

Perez – I came to seek a better life and so that my children can get a better education. My kids wanted to learn English while in Mexico. But it was very difficult for me to pay for the classes because they were very expensive. So, I looked for a way to come to the United States [so that my kids could learn English] and to have a better life. And, well, I found it [a better life] and here I am.

RB – And you crossed undocumented?

Perez – Yes.

RB – Why? Is it difficult to obtain a VISA? 5:27

Perez – Yes, for me yes, because over there in Zacatecas I had to have a bank account. That was the first difficulty.

RB – What are the requirements for obtaining a VISA?

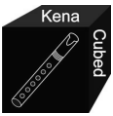
Perez – Well, you have to have a full-time job, a large amount of money, and you have to own property. I had the property already – my house. But the job didn't pay much and I didn't have a bank account.

RB – Do you think that there would be fewer people crossing the border if the U.S. government had more patrols watching the border?

Perez – No, I don't think so. I think that people will still come no matter the amount of patrols and the location where they have to cross. I don't think they would stop.

RB – What do you think about people like the Minute Man Project participants? They're not part of the Border patrol, but they're going to patrol the border. They're going to follow the undocumented persons and report them to the Border Patrol.

Perez – No, I don't like that idea. For me it's something very inhumane. I know that for a long time it is always been like this. People are always trying to prevent undocumented persons from entering the



country. But this [illegal entry] will continue taking place, and it doesn't matter how much patrolling is conducted.

RB – What is the solution?

Perez – Well, a reform of immigration laws, but first for those of us who are already here. We already have children who are U.S. citizens. Some are from there, others are from here. First for those of us who have already been here for many years. Despite being in a country that is not ours, and where we are 'illegals,' we're living positive lives here. We've come to work. We haven't come here to take away anything from anyone, but rather so that our children can get a good education. I think that an amnesty law would be a solution for thousands of families that need it.

### **Interview with a Mexican Police Officer**

I crossed the line into Naco, Mexico, in order to get a perspective from the other side. That perspective was told by Juan Luis Valenzuela, the officer in charge of the Naco Municipal Police.

RB – What do you think about this Minute Man Project?

Valenzuela – Well, what *can* we think? It's problematic, right? I'm just here waiting; hopefully nothing will happen. I'm here only worrying about it.

RB – Have you communicated with the Border Patrol?

Valenzuela – Yes, we have a good relationship with elements of the Border Patrol. We are in contact with them. Moreover, we have both patrolled the line [border]. We are in contact with them and everything is under control.

RB – [To clarify...] Is the Mexican police patrolling the border?

Valenzuela – That's affirmative.

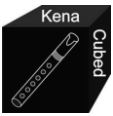
RB – Do you think the Minute Man Participants are racist?

Valenzuela – Well, what *can* we think? It's outside of the law because they have their laws. They are racist, for my method of thinking. It's not right. That shouldn't happen. And the American government shouldn't allow it.

RB – And what is the solution to the problem of illegal immigration in the United States?

Valenzuela – The solution is to give them amnesty. They go there to work. It's the same problem as in 1942, when they contracted with the people [undocumented immigrants], they gave them amnesty. Now, it's the same situation. The people only go to work.

RB – And what do you do to impede people from crossing the border? What is the role of the Mexican Police?



Valenzuela – Everyone here on this side of the border are in their country. We can't do anything against them because they are in their country.

RB – There are people, especially the Minute Man Participants, who say that the United States government should pressure the Mexican government to do more for the poor people in Mexico.

Valenzuela – Well yes, but everybody has the American Dream. That's what happens to the people out here. It's the American Dream, the green cash. That's what they want. Even if there are more jobs, people will go where they can earn more. It's about the capacity of the country. There *are* jobs in Mexico. Unfortunately people leave. Because we who are here, we're working, we're earning money. But the people leave to earn more.

### **Undocumented Immigrants and Economics**

The Mexican police officer was right. Even if someone can get a job, it's a whole lot better to be paid 10 times more. So, undocumented immigrants come here to work. As a result, immigrants have a substantial economic impact. In a [report about Arizona](#) dated September 15, 2009, the Immigration Policy Center states that, "If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Arizona, the state would lose \$26.4 billion in expenditures, \$11.7 billion in economic output, and approximately 140,324 jobs" (p.2, citing the Perryman Group). The IPC also highlights data from the U.S. Census and other researchers.

- In 2004, immigrant workers contributed \$2.4 billion of state tax revenue.
- Latinos and Asians have an estimated \$37 billion in consumer purchasing power.
- Immigrant businesses had sales receipts of \$12.2 billion and employed almost 65,000 people.
- Only about 30% of immigrants are naturalized citizens. However, this also means they are eligible to vote.
- Statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau show that one-third of Arizona's population is Latino (29.7% in 2007) or Asian (2.4% in 2007). Latinos made up 11.7% of Arizona voters in 2008.
- In 2007, immigrants comprised 19.3% of Arizona's workforce, of which 9.8% were undocumented.

The point is that undocumented immigrants are integral to the American economy. Stay tuned for more in-depth interviews and reports about immigration.