

IMMIGRANTS RALLY TO DEMAND FAIR TREATMENT

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Body

Seven hundred New Yorkers - most of them **immigrants** - gathered in Flushing on Saturday to send a powerful message: "We **demand** to be treated with dignity and fairness, and we will not be ignored or intimidated."

Men and women, young and old, they came, many with children in tow, from Staten Island, Brooklyn and Queens to pack the Ganesh Temple auditorium in Flushing. The crowd was impressive for its size and for its determination to be heard.

"We are here today . . . to work together to make New York a city responsive to the needs of the people who work and live here," Ana María Archila, co-executive director of Make the Road New York, told the crowd.

With more than 4,000 members, Make the Road New York was created last year with the merger of the Latin American Integration Center and Make the Road by Walking, two grass-roots community organizations.

"I would like to welcome the elected officials, our allies in the labor movement and the community organizations - and all of you," Archila said to the enthusiastic approval of the audience.

No less enthusiastic were the 10 elected officials who attended the event and embraced the community's **demands**. All of them promised to help.

It would have been difficult for Rep. Nydia Velázquez (D-Bronx), City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, City Controller Bill Thompson, state Sen. John Sabini (D-Jackson Heights), Councilman John Liu (D-Flushing) and the other members of the Council and the state Senate present at the meeting to do otherwise. The community's **demands** were nothing if not **fair**, and went a long way toward defining the priorities of **immigrant** New Yorkers.

Increased educational and economic opportunity, comprehensive immigration reform, healthy and affordable housing, equal access to government benefits and services and the expansion of civil rights across our communities for **immigrants**, workers, students and gay people - this is what the people gathered at the Ganesh temple were asking for.

To stress even more the urgent need for those **demands** to be met, several community members shared moving personal stories of mistreatment and discrimination. One of them was Alejandro Carreras, who came from Ecuador six years ago and joined Make the Road by Walking two years ago.

"Due to my immigration status, it has been difficult for me to find a dignified job in this country," he told the audience. "I have to do very hard jobs, but I have no choice because I have to support my family and myself."

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Carreras went on to recount a terrible experience of exploitation and abuse by an employer who took advantage of his undocumented status.

"Some time ago, I worked with a cement contractor. I worked for him two weeks, under the sun. And when the job was finished, he did not pay me one single cent," he said.

Then he added something that many others in the audience already had learned the hard way.

"Unfortunately," Carreras said, "these experiences are all too frequent. Thousands of workers in New York have had similar experiences," he said.

And, addressing the elected officials directly, he added, "That's why I am asking you to help pass stronger laws in New York to protect immigrant workers."

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