



USCCB Committee on Migration

C/O MIGRATION AND REFUGEE SERVICES

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**Statement of Most Reverend Gerald R. Barnes
Bishop of San Bernardino
Chairman, USCCB Committee on Migration**

September 12, 2006

On behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration, I call upon President Bush and members of the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives to work together to produce a fair and just comprehensive immigration reform bill.

Just legislation should include a viable path to citizenship for undocumented persons residing in our nation; a temporary worker program which protects the rights of both U.S. and foreign-born laborers; reforms in the family-based immigration system by reducing backlogs and shortening times for family reunification; and restoration of due process protection for immigrants.

Immigration enforcement also should be an important component of comprehensive immigration reform. We caution, however, that enforcement measures should not undermine the fairness of our laws and should ensure that the human dignity of the person is protected. We will oppose enforcement initiatives which do not meet this test and which do not include other aspects of comprehensive reform.

It is our view that immigration is a moral issue because it impacts the human dignity and human rights of the person. It is an issue which should supersede political concerns. I call on our elected officials to move beyond partisan politics and negative rhetoric and work for a solution which repairs our flawed immigration system.

In December 2005, the House of Representatives passed immigration legislation that focused only on enforcement measures. While we believe that many of the provisions in the legislation are overly punitive, we believe that House passage of immigration legislation, with its important emphasis on border security, was an important step that began the national immigration debate. In May of this year, the U.S. Senate passed a more comprehensive piece of legislation, which, while imperfect, contains the structure and many of the elements necessary to address our immigration crisis.

The time has come for the leaders of both chambers to come together and enact legislation which protects the human dignity of immigrants while also ensuring the integrity of our borders and the security of our nation. The only way for our nation to achieve this goal is to adopt a comprehensive immigration reform measure.

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