



## USCCB Committee on Migration

C/O MIGRATION AND REFUGEE SERVICES

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### **Statement of Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick Archbishop of Washington Comprehensive Immigration Reform March 1, 2006**

Good morning. I am pleased to be here today with my fellow interfaith leaders to speak about a subject which has a profound impact on our nation--the issue of immigration.

Today, as we speak to you, the U.S. Senate is poised to consider legislation which could change how our country responds to the newcomer, to the downtrodden, and to the oppressed who come to our shores seeking a better life. It is an important time, and it is vital that all American citizens, most particularly members of faith communities, understand the present moment in which we live and act to ensure that our nation does not forsake her immigrant history.

As we all know, immigration is not a simple issue, but one that evokes strong passions and economic, legal, social, and national security debates. We are here today, representing our individual faith communities, because we believe that immigration is not just a theoretical policy issue, but ultimately a humanitarian issue that impacts the basic dignity and life of the person, created in the image and likeness of God. It is because of its impact on basic human dignity and human life that we believe immigration is, first and foremost, a moral issue.

All sides in the debate agree on one thing: our nation's immigration policy is flawed and needs to be repaired. It is a matter of human justice. Every day, we in the Catholic Church see the human consequences of this flawed system. Our parishes, agencies, hospitals, and pastoral ministries are called upon daily to respond to the many needs of new immigrants, hard-working people who have fled their homeland in despair and fear. They ask us for a loving heart, a helping hand, for medical care, legal assistance, and counseling. We see families separated, workers exploited, and migrants abused by smugglers and who sometimes even die in the desert.

Changing the status quo is an issue of moral gravity. Our nation must create an immigration response that is humane, while also serving our nation's economic and national security needs. Any legislation must include:

- policy directions which address the root causes of migration, such as economic development, so that migrants can remain in their home countries to support themselves and their families;
- reform of our legal immigration system, including the adoption of an earned legalization program for undocumented workers and their families; a temporary worker program with appropriate protections for both U.S. and foreign workers; and reform of the family preference system, so families can be reunited in a timely fashion;

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#### MEMBERS

Most Reverend Gerald Barnes, Chairman  
Most Reverend Sean O'Malley  
Most Reverend Kevin Farrell  
Most Reverend Curtis John Guillory  
Most Reverend Gerald Kicanas  
Most Reverend Dominic Luong  
Most Reverend Armando Ochoa

#### CONSULTANTS

His Eminence Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I.  
His Eminence Adam Cardinal Maida  
His Eminence Theodore Cardinal McCarrick  
Most Reverend J. Kevin Boland  
Most Reverend Edgar da Cunha, SDV  
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Most Reverend John Manz  
Most Reverend Joseph Perry  
Most Reverend Thomas Wenski  
Most Reverend John Wester  
Reverend Jerry Brown  
Sister Raymonda Du Vall  
Mr. Robert Gilligan

Mr. Ken Hackett  
Mr. Don Kerwin

- restoration of due process protections for immigrants to allow them to have “their day in court,” consistent with American values.

These elements are best embodied in S. 1033/H.R. 2330, the *Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act of 2005*. As the Senate Judiciary Committee and the full U.S. Senate begin consideration of a Senate bill, we ask that principles embodied in the *Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act* receive strong consideration and support. We also ask that the Agricultural Jobs, Opportunity, Benefits, and Security Act (AgJOBS) legislation, which helps our nation’s farm workers, and the DREAM Act, which assists undocumented students who came to our nation through no fault of their own, and the Unaccompanied Alien Child Protection Act are included in any final legislative package.

In our view, only a comprehensive approach to immigration reform will effectively address our nation’s immigration crisis. This is why the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) strongly opposes H.R. 4437, the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Act of 2005, an enforcement-only bill which was passed by the House of Representatives in December.

Let me be clear. The Catholic Church acknowledges and supports the right of a sovereign nation to secure its borders, most particularly at a time in which national security is in question. However, we believe H.R. 4437 goes well beyond the issue of national security, is overly broad and punitive, and would bring undue harm to immigrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees.

If enacted, H.R. 4437 would alter basic American values of fairness and due process and severely weaken our asylum and refugee protection system. Its scope and reach would extend to U.S. citizens as well, including those, such as our own parishioners, who offer, in an act of mercy, basic sustenance to an undocumented migrant. In short, H.R. 4437 would fundamentally change the heritage of our nation as a welcoming, compassionate, and open society, a heritage which has made us the strong nation we are today. We urge its defeat.

Today is Ash Wednesday, when Christians around the world observe the beginning of Lent. During this period Catholics pray, fast, and prepare for the coming of Easter and the Resurrection of New Life. These 40 days of Lent recall the time Jesus spent in the desert fasting and praying.

Today, many of our brothers and sisters find themselves in their own desert—sometimes literally. They risk their lives to support their families, and they bring to our nation a strong work ethic, family values, and a deep spirituality. It is my prayer that we do not abandon them, that we embrace their many gifts, and that, in the very near future, their suffering will end.

In closing, then, I urge Congress and President Bush to work together in the days ahead to create a new immigration system which protects our national security, respects our common humanity, and reflects the values—fairness, compassion, and opportunity—and the people, including the immigrants, upon which our nation was built. Thank you.