



Statement on Comprehensive Immigration Reform: People Before Politics

Interfaith Press Conference
Archbishop Daniel N. DiNardo, D.D., S.T.L.
Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston
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Good afternoon. I am pleased to be here today with my fellow interfaith leaders to speak about the issue of immigration reform. Today, the Senate resumes their discussions of this issue after the Passover/Easter recess. It is our sincere hope that each of the Senators will return to Washington with a renewed spirit to continue their work on creating a just solution to the complex questions they face. We have joined together today to call upon the Senate to enact comprehensive immigration reform legislation that establishes a safe and humane immigration system. The dignity and worth of the human person is fundamental in all deliberations.

We urge the United States Senate to enact comprehensive immigration reform that secures our borders, leads to quicker family reunification, and makes it possible for those who want to come to our country to work to be treated with respect for their human dignity. Reform legislation must address the reality that our economy benefits from foreign workers, and those who are here without legal status should have the opportunity to regularize their status without leaving the country or be denied access to citizenship. We need to chart a course for the future of our nation that maintains our ideals as a nation of immigrants, restores the rule of law, and protects the homeland. While we must support humane enforcement of our country's immigration laws, we also believe that the current laws are ineffective and no longer fit the economic realities and security needs of our country. They do not strengthen family unity. We must find a way to bring our undocumented sisters and brothers out of the shadows, welcome them into our churches, and incorporate them into society to ensure that they have a place at the table of humanity and Christianity. This is in accordance with the Gospel call of Christ to see His face in the poor and the stranger.

The pending compromise proposal, sponsored by Senators Hagel (R-NE) and Martinez (R-FL), includes many provisions that are helpful in the eyes of many faith-based groups but still

includes harsh enforcement provisions. While the bill appears to be a step in the right direction to addressing comprehensive, fair and just immigration reform with pathways to legalization, we remain concerned with some of the overly punitive enforcement provisions. We believe that enforcement should be targeted, humane and proportional. For example, we need to target traffickers, be humane by creating separate detention centers for women and children and be proportional by ensuring that enforcement provisions for a worker would be different than for a terrorist or smuggler. We therefore urge the Senate to take steps to remove the harsh enforcement provisions from the bill. Furthermore, it is vital that the integrity of any compromise reached in the Senate is not undermined when the Senate proposal goes to conference with the enforcement-only proposal passed by the U.S. House of Representatives.

We are strongly opposed to legislation that was passed by the United States House of Representatives, H.R. 4437, the so-called Border Protection, Antiterrorism, Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005. We urge the members of the United States Senate especially our two senators, Senator John Cornyn and Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, to reject this legislation and measures like it. This punitive legislation will do nothing to secure a more stable border, which we support. In fact, it will drive further underground those who are coming to our country seeking a better way of life, and thus put them at greater risk for exploitation by the unscrupulous.

We have not come to our position lightly—it is based on the Gospel and long-standing Church teaching. Our diverse faith traditions teach us to welcome our brothers and sisters with love and compassion. The Hebrew Bible tells us: "The strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as the natives among you, and you shall love them as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Leviticus 19:33-34)." In the New Testament, Jesus tells us to welcome the stranger (cf. Matthew 25:35), for "what you do to the least of my brethren, you do unto me (Matthew 25:40)."