Congress to Address Immigration Reform

As Congress once again debates immigration reform, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has called for Congress and President Obama to enact comprehensive immigration reform legislation by the end of 2009. At its recent spring meeting, the USCCB called attention to the humanitarian issues related to immigrants' illegal entry and their undocumented status. A statement issued by the USCCB decried the status quo that perpetuates a permanent underclass of persons from whose labor this society benefits without offering them legal protections.

The USCCB supports a comprehensive set of reforms designed to change U.S. immigration laws and policies to reflect the principles contained in Scripture and in Catholic Social Teaching:

- International economic policies intended to improve conditions in impoverished nations could reduce the number of migrants leaving their homes out of necessity.
- To reduce abuses in the U.S. temporary worker program, the Bishops support a program that includes a verifiable and achievable path to permanent residency and strong enforcement mechanisms.
- Undocumented immigrants should have opportunities to earn legalization if they have equities in the U.S. and can demonstrate good character. The USCCB supports an "earned" legalization program that is achievable and independently verifiable.

The Bishops urge reconsideration of laws and policies allowing detention for months without charges, secret hearings, and ethnic cleansing. They state that these laws and policies do not make us safer, tarnish our heritage, and damage our reputation abroad. The Bishops support changes to immigration laws and policies consistent with due process rights. The Bishops also call for a reduction in the backlog of visas and an increase in the number of visas available for family reunification purposes.