

INTERFAITH STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM

October 14, 2005

We, the undersigned faith-based leaders and organizations, join together to call upon President Bush and our elected officials in Congress to enact comprehensive immigration reform legislation that establishes a safe and humane immigration system consistent with our values. 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)." The Qur'an tells us that we should "serve God...and do good to...orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer that you meet, [and those who have nothing] (4:36)." The Hindu scripture Taitiriya Upanishad tells us: "The guest is a representative of God (1.11.2)"

We call for immigration reform because each day in our congregations, service programs, health-care facilities, and schools we witness the human consequences of an outmoded system. We see and hear the suffering of immigrant families who have lost loved ones to death in the desert or immigrants themselves who have experienced exploitation in the workplace or abuse at the hands of unscrupulous smugglers and others. In our view, changes to the U.S. legal immigration system would help put an end to this suffering, which offends the dignity of all human beings.

We call upon our elected officials to enact legislation that includes the following:

- An opportunity for hard-working immigrants who are already contributing to this country to come out of the shadows, regularize their status upon satisfaction of reasonable criteria and, over time, pursue an option to become lawful permanent residents and eventually United States citizens;
- Reforms in our family-based immigration system to significantly reduce waiting times for separated families who currently wait many years to be reunited;
- The creation of legal avenues for workers and their families who wish to migrate to the U.S. to enter our country and work in a safe, legal, and orderly manner with their rights fully protected; and
- Border protection policies that are consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect, while allowing the authorities to carry out the critical task of identifying and preventing entry of terrorists and dangerous criminals, as well as pursuing the legitimate task of implementing American immigration policy.

While we support the right of the government to enforce the law and protect the national security interests of the United States, we recognize that our existing complex and unworkable immigration system has made it nearly impossible for many immigrants – who seek to support their families or reunite with loved ones – to achieve legal status. Reforming the immigration system to address this reality would allow the U.S. government to focus its enforcement efforts on real threats that face all Americans – citizens and immigrants alike.

We urge our elected officials to conduct the immigration reform debate in a civil and respectful manner, mindful not to blame immigrants for our social and economic ills or for the atrocities committed by the few who have carried out acts of terrorism. A polarized process that is lacking in civility would hinder deliberative discourse and not serve the best interests of our nation.

As faith-based leaders and organizations, we call attention to the moral dimensions of public policy and pursue policies that uphold the human dignity of each person, all of whom are made in the image of God. We engage the immigration issue with the goal of fashioning an immigration system that facilitates legal status and family unity in the interest of serving the God-given dignity and rights of every individual. It is our collective prayer that the legislative process will produce a just immigration system of which our nation of immigrants can be proud.

National Organizations:

Anti-Defamation League
American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)
American Jewish Committee
American Jewish Congress
American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA)
B'nai B'rith International
Catholic Charities USA
Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC)
Church World Service/Immigration and Refugee Program
Columban Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Office
Conference of Major Superiors of Men
Episcopal Church USA
Gamaliel National Clergy Caucus Leadership Council
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)
Hindu American Foundation
International Catholic Migration Commission
Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
Institute on Religion and Public Policy
Irish Apostolate, USA
Islamic Circle of North America
Jesuit Conference
Jesuit Refugee Service/USA
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Jewish Labor Committee
Jewish Reconstructionist Federation
Jubilee Campaign USA
Justice for Our Neighbors Immigration Clinic Network
La Ermita - The Hermitage
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
Mexican American Cultural Center
Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
National Council of Jewish Women
National Ministries, American Baptist Churches USA
NETWORK--A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Presbyterian Church (USA), Stated Clerk
Shalom Center
Sojourners and Call to Renewal
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops
Union for Reform Judaism
United Jewish Communities
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
United Methodist Committee on Relief
United States Province of the Priests of the Sacred Heart
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
Wider Church Ministries - United Church of Christ
Women In Islam, Inc.
Women's League for Conservative Judaism
World Relief

Local Organizations:

American Jewish Committee, New York
Arizona Interfaith Network
Atonement Lutheran Church, Jackson Heights, New York
Baltimore Jewish Council

Brethren Witness/Washington Office
Building Bridges: Hispanic Outreach Project Community of St. Anthony Church in Canton, Ohio
Bultasa Buddhist Temple of Chicago, Illinois
Cabrini Immigrant Services, Dobbs Ferry, New York
Cabrini Immigrant Services, New York, New York
California Province of the Society of Jesus
Canaan Presbyterian Church, Chicago, Illinois
Capuchin Province of St. Joseph, Detroit, Michigan
Cathedral Community Cares, New York, New York
Catholic Charities Community Services, Archdiocese of New York
Catholic Charities Diocese of Des Moines
Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego
Catholic Charities Hawaii
Catholic Charities Health and Human Services, Diocese of Cleveland
Catholic Charities Housing Opportunities (CCHO), Youngstown, Ohio
Catholic Charities in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, New Mexico
Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Paterson, New Jersey
Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington, Virginia
Catholic Charities of Tennessee, Inc.
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, Texas
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington
Catholic Defense League of Nebraska, Omaha
Catholic Migration Office of the Diocese of Brooklyn, New York
Catholic Social Services in Anchorage, Alaska
Chicago Martyrs Korea Church, Illinois
Church of Praise the Lord, Los Angeles, California
Clerics of St. Viator, Chicago Province
Comision Latina of the Episcopal Diocese of California
Commonwealth Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Richmond, Virginia
Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of San Antonio
Congregation of Holy Cross, Southern Province
Congregation of Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters, Huntington, Indiana
Crossroads United Church of Christ, Indianola, Iowa
Daughters of Wisdom of the United States Province, Islip, New York
Detroit Province of the Society of Jesus
East Valley Interfaith Project, Mesa, Arizona
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon
En Camino, Migrant and Immigrant Services, Diocese of Toledo, Ohio
Faith Action for Community Equity (FACE), Hawaii
Family Unity & Citizenship Program of the Diocese of Las Cruces
Galilee Korean United Methodist Church, Chicago Illinois
Grace Church, Chicago, Illinois
Greater New York Labor-Religion Coalition, New York
Heartland Center/Office of Peace and Social Justice of The Diocese of Gary
HIAS and Council Migration Services of Philadelphia
Hogar Hispano - Catholic Charities, Falls Church, Virginia
Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen, New York, New York
Houston Dominican Sisters
Human Concerns Commission of the Diocese of San Jose
Imam Ali Mosque, Brooklyn, New York
Interfaith Refugee and Immigration Ministries of Illinois
Islamic Cultural Center of New York
Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action, Boston
Jewish Federation of Greater Middlesex County, New Jersey
Jewish Community Action, St. Paul, Minnesota
Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Southern Arizona

Joo Sung Church, Los Angeles, California
Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, New York, New York
Korean Churches Federation of Greater Chicago, Illinois
Korean United Presbyterian Church, Chicago, Illinois
Korean United Methodist Church of South Suburban Chicago, Illinois
Lakeview Korean Presbyterian Church, Chicago, Illinois
Lord's Grace Presbyterian Church, Los Angeles, California
Lord's Love Mission Church, Los Angeles, California
Lutheran Children and Family Service of Eastern Pennsylvania
Lutheran Family Services in the Carolinas
Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota
Lutheran Social Services of Michigan
Lutheran Social Services of New England
Lutheran Social Services of Northern New England
Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota
Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area
Marianist Province of the United States, St. Louis, Missouri
Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty, New York
Migration and Refugee Services Diocese of Trenton, New Jersey
Mision San Juan Bautista, Rego Park, New York
Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, Province of the Immaculate Conception, Paterson, New Jersey
Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Stella Maris Province, New York, New York
Missionhurst-CICM, Arlington, Virginia
National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Des Moines, Iowa
New Life Chicago Church, Illinois
Northern Arizona Interfaith Council Sponsoring Committee
Northern Indiana Ecumenical Multicultural Ministry (NIEMM), Morocco, Indiana
Organización for Latino Awareness of the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago
Pima County Interfaith Council, Tucson, Arizona
Priests of the Sacred Heart (SCJ), Hales Corners, Wisconsin
Project IRENE, Springfield, Illinois
Provincial Council of the Province of St. John the Baptist of the Order of Friars Minor, Cincinnati, Ohio
River's Edge Community Church, Oella, Maryland
Saints Peter and Paul Church, Savannah, Georgia
Salem Korean United Methodist Church, Chicago, Illinois
Same Difference Interfaith Alliance, New York, New York
Sikh Coalition, New York, New York
Sikh Dharma International, New York, New York
Society of Jesus (Jesuits), New York Province
Society of the Divine Word, Chicago Province
St Benedict's Abbey, Benet Lake, Wisconsin
St James Faithful Citizenship, Elizabethtown, Kentucky
St James Parish Council, Elizabethtown, Kentucky
St James Parish Social Ministries, Elizabethtown, Kentucky
St Paul Chong Korean Catholic Church, Chicago, Illinois
True Jesus Church, Los Angeles, California
True Light Korean Presbyterian Church, Los Angeles, California
UJA-Federation of New York
Valley Interfaith Project, Phoenix, Arizona
Vincentian Center for Church and Society at St. John's University, New York
Washington Buddhist Peace Fellowship (WBPF)
West Side Campaign Against Hunger, Church of St. Paul & St. Andrew, United Methodist, New York, New York
Western Dominican Province, Oakland, California
Wisconsin Province of the Society of Jesus
Yuma County Interfaith Sponsoring Committee, Arizona

Individual Faith Leaders:

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Francis Cardinal George, Archbishop of Chicago
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Abbot Jerome Kodell, OSB, Subiaco, Arkansas
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Most Reverend Carlos Sevilla, S.J., Bishop of Yakima, Washington
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Madonna Della Strada, Jesuit Residence
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Rabbi Arthur Waskow, The Shalom Center
Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski, Bishop of Orlando
Professor Elie Wiesel, Boston University

The signatories on this statement were updated March 16, 2006. This statement remains open for sign-on by faith-based organizations, denominations, individual places of worship, and individual faith leaders. To endorse, please contact Stephanie Faith Green: stephanie.faith.green@hias.org or 202-828-5115.