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STATEMENT

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STATEMENT FROM CARDINAL JUSTIN RIGALI ON IMMIGRATION REFORM

The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed a bill concerning immigration policy. Among its provisions, H.R. 4437 makes all undocumented immigrants criminals; removes due process protection to asylum-seekers and refugees, including children; and mandates the detention of families and other vulnerable groups along our border. It also subjects humanitarian workers, including Church workers, to five years in prison simply for providing basic needs assistance, such as food and water, to an undocumented immigrant.

Cardinal Justin Rigali, Archbishop of Philadelphia, issued this statement on immigration reform legislation currently in Congress.

This week the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, along with the Catholic Church throughout the United States, celebrates "National Migration Week," which recognizes the contributions of immigrants and refugees to the Church and our nation. Here in Philadelphia, newcomers have helped revitalize our city by bringing energy and industry to our city neighborhoods. Nationally, immigrants, refugees, and other new arrivals have, over the past 100 years, infused new ideas, skills and culture into our country, making it the great nation it is today.

Congress, with the support of President Bush, should seek to repair our broken immigration system by enacting comprehensive immigration legislation that reforms all aspects of our nation's immigration system, not simply law enforcement. Such legislation should propose an earned legalization program for the 11 million undocumented persons in the country. Earned legalization is not amnesty because the proposal requires immigrants to work for up to six years before applying for legal permanent residency. The bill should include a temporary worker program, which would provide legal channels for migrant workers to migrate in a safe, legal and orderly manner; and reductions in family visa backlogs, which causes family separation for up to 10 years or more. This approach offers stronger security measures because it provides an incentive for undocumented immigrants and their families to "come out of the shadows" and identify themselves to government authorities.

The U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, chaired by Senator Arlen Specter, will consider comprehensive immigration reform early this year. Senator Specter and his colleagues in the Senate have a historic opportunity to adopt an immigration bill that will fix our broken immigration system and prepare our nation for migration realities of the twenty-first century.

I urge Senator Specter and the U.S. Senate to reject H.R. 4437 and adopt a more comprehensive and humane approach to immigration reform. I also urge Catholics and others of good will to support this approach.

Our nation stands at a critical juncture in its history. Before venturing down the path of exclusion and intolerance, we must remember that all of us, except for American Indians, are immigrants or descendants of immigrants. Together, we can create an immigration system that reflects our national values, promotes our national security and is worthy of our great nation, a nation of immigrants.

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