

**Statement of Most Reverend Gerald R. Barnes
Bishop of San Bernardino
Chairman, USCCB Committee on Migration
On
Presidential Address to the Nation on Immigration**

May 15, 2006

On behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I welcome tonight's presidential address to the nation on the need to reform our immigration system. It is important that the president highlight this issue to the American people as one of urgent national priority. For several years now, the U.S. bishops have urged our elected officials to address our nation's immigration crisis in a just, humane, and comprehensive manner.

The Catholic Church supports the right of a sovereign nation to control its border. As we have stated in the past, however, an enforcement-only approach to this crisis will not solve the problem of illegal immigration.

Over the past ten to twelve years, our nation has spent billions of dollars on border enforcement and has tripled the number of Border Patrol agents along the U.S.-Mexico border. Yet, our nation's immigration system, including its legal channels for entering the country, remain woefully antiquated and ill-suited to address today's migration phenomenon. Consequently, during the same period that border enforcement has grown, the number of undocumented in our nation has doubled and the number of deaths of migrants in the desert has risen sharply.

News reports indicate that President Bush will use the speech to announce the authorization of the use of National Guard troops along the U.S.-Mexico border. I am concerned about the introduction of military personnel because there has not been an adequate public discussion about its implications, especially for the treatment of migrants.

The U.S. Bishops have stated consistently that the real solution to the immigration crisis lies in a comprehensive approach to the problem. This approach must include a long-term strategy to address the root causes of flight, such as combating poverty in sending countries. It also must include comprehensive reform of our nation's immigration laws which features an opportunity to earn citizenship for the undocumented in our country and the creation of legal avenues for migration for migrants to work and join families in a safe, orderly, and humane manner. We are hopeful that the president also will commit himself to these elements as part of a comprehensive immigration reform bill.

Our nation stands at a critical juncture in her history. As a nation of immigrants, we must look back at our history and recognize that America was founded and built by immigrants. Working together, we can find a humane solution to the immigration crisis which upholds our national values and preserves human life and human dignity.