



Committee on Migration

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**Statement of Most Reverend John C. Wester
Bishop of Salt Lake City
Chairman, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration**

On

Worksite Enforcement Raids

September 10, 2008

On behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I call upon the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and President Bush to reexamine the use of worksite enforcement raids as an immigration enforcement tool. The humanitarian costs of these raids are immeasurable and unacceptable in a civilized society.

In the absence of comprehensive immigration reform, we have sought to work collaboratively with DHS to ensure that raids are carried out humanely. It seems to us that DHS has attempted to abide by several humanitarian considerations in executing some of the workplace raids.

However, we believe that DHS has not gone far enough to ensure that human rights protections are consistently applied in all enforcement actions.

For over a year now, DHS has targeted employers who hire unauthorized workers by using force to enter worksites and arrest immigrant workers. During the process of these raids, U.S.-citizen children have been separated from their parents for days, if not longer; immigrants arrested have not been afforded the rights of due process; and local communities, including legal permanent residents and U.S. citizens, have been disrupted and dislocated. The sweeping nature of these raids---which often involve hundreds of law enforcement personnel with weapons---strike fear in immigrant communities and make it difficult for those arrested to secure basic due process protections, including legal counsel.

We have witnessed first-hand the suffering of immigrant families and are gravely concerned about the collateral human consequences of immigration enforcement raids on the family unit. Many of our local parishes have helped respond to human needs generated by these enforcement actions, providing counseling and legal services to parents and children and basic needs assistance to immigrant communities.

Raids strike immigrant communities unexpectedly, leaving the affected immigrant families to cope in their aftermath. Husbands are separated from their wives, and children are separated from their parents. Many families never recover; others never reunite.

As our government confronts the challenges of immigration, let it not forget one of its core duties: protecting the family unit as the fundamental institution upon which society and government itself depends.

While we do not question the right and duty of our government to enforce the law, we do question whether worksite enforcement raids are the most effective and humane method for performing this duty, particularly as they are presently being implemented. In this regard, we ask DHS to immediately pledge to take the following actions to mitigate the human costs of these raids:

- DHS should refrain from enforcement activity in certain areas that provide humanitarian relief—churches, hospitals, community health centers, schools, food banks, and other community-based organizations that provide charitable services;
- Primary, not simply sole, caregivers should be released following an enforcement action to care for their children. A variety of release mechanisms, including parole in the public interest, release on recognizance, bail, and alternatives to detention should be utilized for this purpose:
- DHS should facilitate access to meaningful legal representation for arrested individuals so that they are aware of their legal rights and options;
- Enforcement actions should be conducted in a manner which preserves basic human dignity: immigrants who are working to survive and support their families should not be treated like criminals.
- Mechanisms should be instituted to allow family members to remain together and to locate each other during and following an enforcement action. Non-profit and community groups should be engaged in this effort.

Absent the effective and immediate implementation of these safeguards, we believe that these enforcement raids should be abandoned.

Immigration enforcement raids demonstrate politically the ability of the government to enforce the law. They do little, however, to solve the broader challenge of illegal immigration. They also reveal, sadly, the failure of a seriously flawed immigration system, which, as we have consistently stated, requires comprehensive reform.

As they begin their general election campaigns, we urge the two presidential candidates to engage the issue of immigration in a humane, thoughtful, and courageous manner.

We urge our elected and appointed officials to turn away from enforcement-only methods and direct their energy toward the adoption of comprehensive immigration reform legislation.

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