

## **Statement of Most Reverend John C. Wester On Worksite Enforcement Raids**

**Wednesday, 10 September 2008 00:00**

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.

- 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.