

Catholic Church. National Conference
of Catholic Bishops.
Resolution on immigration... ADV 1383

Resolution on Immigration Reform

November 14, 1985

National Conference of Catholic Bishops

The following *Resolution on Immigration Reform* was passed unanimously by the general membership of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops during its plenary assembly on November 14, 1985, and is authorized for publication by the undersigned.

January 10, 1986

Monsignor Daniel F. Hoye
General Secretary
NCCB/USCC

For many reasons, the Catholic Church has a strong interest in immigration and immigration-related legislation. We now express our specific concern for legislative proposals pertaining to undocumented immigration and foreign agricultural workers.

Although the Catholic bishops share the concerns of many other persons on these matters, we believe that the approaches now being most actively pursued are neither workable nor morally acceptable. In particular, we hold that any viable program of immigration reform must be based on legalization as its foundation, rather than as an ancillary and conditional component. An acceptable program must, therefore, include the following elements:

- legalization opportunities for the maximum number of undocumented aliens;
- an extensive, aggressive outreach effort to eligible aliens;
- application deadlines and requirements for qualification that are both generous in respect to the number of aliens included and realistic in terms of the time-frame for application;
- no administrative arbitrariness in determining who shall be excluded;
- the provision of adequate appellate recourse for those disqualified by the Immigration and Naturalization Service;

- active participation in planning by representative ethnic groups and by responsible community and denominational migration agencies;
- screening of applications by responsible agencies before submission to the INS in order to ensure eligibility; and
- provision to the newly legalized of the same protections and benefits available to all resident aliens.

Only when legalization is treated as the centerpiece of immigration reform is it conceivable that the bishops will judge employer sanctions tolerable. Until that time, we shall oppose employer sanctions. This means that we shall consider accepting sanctions only if they

- are part of a generous and fair legalization program that will benefit most undocumented persons now in the country;
- are accompanied by stringent antidiscrimination legislation;
- call for the development of a secure and uniform national employment identification system (e.g., a tamper-proof social security card) required of all applicants for employment; and
- offer substantive reassurances that enforcement will not fall disproportionately on employers employing Hispanics and Orientals and on employers in areas with high concentrations of foreign-born and other minority persons.

As for foreign temporary agricultural worker programs, the Catholic bishops cannot accept any large-scale new program, nor can we accept "reforms" of existing programs whose net effect would be the erosion of protections offered U.S. farm workers and the deterioration of wages, as well as living and working conditions, for all farm workers.

In conclusion, we submit that this might be a useful time for Congress and the nation to

pause and reevaluate the model on which current proposals for immigration reform are based and separate the legalization/sanctions reforms from the issue of temporary agricultural workers. The Catholic bishops in the United States are committed to help fashion legislation that will truly reflect the American commitment to social and economic justice for all.

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