

## Statement of Central American, Mexican, Canadian and U.S. Catholic Bishops on Regional Migration

Tecún Umán, Guatemala  
June 4, 2009

We bishops of Central America, Mexico, Canada, and the United States, called to be pastors in the image of our Lord Jesus, gathered in Tecún Umán, Diocese of San Marcos on the border of Mexico and Guatemala, with our brother priests, religious, and lay faithful providing pastoral care to migrants, share our growing concerns about the migration phenomenon and wish to find ways to jointly advocate for laws that respect and protect the human rights of migrants.

This meeting is a continuation of previous conversations held in Mexico and the United States. In this dialogue, we have focused our attention on the thousands and thousands of migrants seeking a better future for their families due to poverty and lack of opportunities in their own countries. We have used the term "migrant" in a broader sense to include refugees, displaced and temporary workers.

In this meeting, we are inspired by Jesus' teaching in the parable of the Good Samaritan, who asks us to demonstrate the love of God by loving the neighbor that suffers.

We are at a pivotal moment in the history of migration in this hemisphere. A new Administration in the United States has announced its intention to reform U.S. immigration law and to work with Mexican and Central American nations to address economic inequities that lead to migration.

The global economic crisis has impacted all nations and must be considered in seeking solutions to problems of illegal immigration. An examination of global economic agreements and their impact on migration flows also must be included.

There is no time to waste. Migrants each day are faced with a dangerous journey and suffer at the hands of smugglers, human traffickers, and drug cartels. They continue to suffer abuse and even death as they seek to find work to support their families.

Special attention should be paid to organized crime syndicates which operate along our borders and within our countries, particularly drug-running operations. These cartels not only threaten migrants, their violence has inhabited towns and communities. Human trafficking networks prey upon vulnerable women, men and children; and is a horrific crime that must be abolished.

The human rights violations of migrants have grown considerably, concentrating in specific areas without the action or intervention of civil authorities.

We are particularly concerned with the impact of migration on the family unit - too often families are separated in our hemisphere. Children all too often bear the brunt of this family separation by being left alone or by being forced to work to support a family who has lost a father or mother. We have verified the vulnerability of many unaccompanied children.

We acknowledge that in our own countries, public awareness about the migration phenomenon - specifically the evil of human trafficking - is lacking. Even more, migrants are considered to be the cause of all kinds of social ills.

The Church recognizes that all the goods of the earth belong to all people. When persons cannot find employment in their country of origin to support themselves and their families, they have a right to find work elsewhere in order to survive. While sovereign governments have the right to enforce borders, we are a Church without borders rooted in Jesus Christ with a universal good that implies a responsibility to advocate in our countries for the basic protection of human rights and dignity of migrants and the creation of humane policies based on moral and ethical principles.

We are saddened when in our own communities migrants are not welcomed as brothers and sisters in our own faith as a member of our Catholic family. We must insist that in the Church, "no one is a stranger".

Migrant World Day has been celebrated for many years. Unfortunately, we have determined that in many dioceses, parishes and communities it doesn't receive the recognition it deserves and it does not recognize the gifts migrants bring with them to receiving communities.

As we reflect, we are filled with hope, affliction, and frustration. At the same time, we believe God is the Almighty and we should not be desperate nor give in.

For all these reasons:

1. We urge U.S., Mexican, Central American and Canadian leaders to find consensus on regional cooperation on migration and development issues, including an assessment of and solution for the root causes of migration.
2. We call for a regional summit of these leaders to discuss these important issues and plan cooperative action.
3. We urge our brother bishops, priests, religious and lay leaders to receive with respect and acceptance our brother and sister migrants on their journey across Central America, the United States and Canada. It is of utmost importance they feel welcome in their communities of origin as well as their receiving communities and to have pastoral accompaniment along their journey.
4. We also call for a re-examination of refugee and asylum protection policies within our hemisphere. Women, children, and families at times flee political or other forms of persecution, but are not given adequate protection in other countries.
5. We are eternally grateful in the name of our Lord, to those who with sacrifice, love and dedication receive and serve migrants in their communities, migrant shelters, and in their families even at the expense of risking their lives. In doing so, they demonstrate their faith and strengthen the pastoral care of migrants.
6. In closing, we would like to recognize Archbishop Agostino Marchetto, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People. His presence brought the solidarity, communion and blessing from St. Peter's successor, Pope Benedict XVI.

In April of 2009, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, in his apostolic visit to the United States, called for a regional solution to the challenge of migration and an effort to address economic inequalities in our hemisphere. We echo the words of His Holiness and commit ourselves to work with our governments to achieve these goals "*to share their joys and hopes, to support them in their sorrows and trials, and to help them flourish in their new home.*"

Mary, Mother of God, intercede always for us.

Most Rev. Agostino Marchetto  
Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People  
Holy See

Most Rev. Alvaro Ramazzini Imeri  
Bishop of San Marcos  
Episcopal Conference of Guatemala

Most Rev. Rafael Romo Muñoz  
Archbishop of Tijuana  
Chairman, Human Mobility  
Episcopal Conference of Mexico

Most Rev. Pedro J. Hernández Cantarero  
Bishop - Vicariato de Darién  
Chairman, Human Mobility  
Episcopal Conference of Panamá

Most Rev. John C. Wester  
Bishop of Salt Lake City  
Chairman, Committee on Migration  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Most Rev. Ángel San Casimiro Fernández  
Bishop of Ciudad Quesada  
Chairman, Human Mobility  
Episcopal Conference of Costa Rica

Most Rev. Bernhard Hombach  
Bishop of Granada  
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Most Rev. François Lapierre p.m.é.  
Bishop de Saint-Hyacinthe  
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