



Jesuit Conference

Office of Justice and Ecology



Statement on Government Shutdown and Immigration Policy

Many important issues regarding immigration policy have been brought into the negotiations over the current government shutdown. It is imperative that lawmakers address them in a way that extends respect and solidarity to all those fleeing poverty, violence or instability in their home countries. As Pope Francis said in his message on World Day of Migrants and Refugees in 2014, “Migrants and refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity” whose circumstances are to be exploited for political gain. Rather we must design policies that extend economic opportunity, physical safety, and above all, a life of dignity to all migrants in need. As Christians, we believe that we belong to one another and that it is our sacred duty to look after “the least of [our] brothers and sisters” (Matthew 25:40).

The urgency of ending the shutdown does not create an ideal context for the full consideration of the important and complex issues surrounding immigration policy. The shutdown itself continues to adversely affect people across the country, in particular, those federal workers who are going without pay. Nonetheless, to the extent that these issues are being considered at this time, it is important that any solutions that are considered fully respect the dignity of migrants.

Broadly speaking, immigration policy in the United States must recognize and address the variety of legitimate reasons that compel individuals to seek a better life in this country, including dire poverty, gang violence, and other human rights abuses. Hostile rhetoric that scapegoats immigrants to justify the use of barriers blinds us to the desperate conditions facing migrants in their home countries.

In his address this past Saturday, President Trump proposed a temporary extension of legal status to some Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, who were brought to this country as children, and some Temporary Protective Status (TPS) holders, who have lived here for many years due to disastrous situations in their countries of origin. The subsequent legislation proposed by Senator McConnell, however, would impose significant new burdens on both categories of people, and remove protection entirely for some. Further, any temporary solution does not adequately recognize the deep roots that DACA recipients and TPS holders have in the United States. They have built their lives here and contribute significantly to the communities in which they live. Many of them have children who are US citizens. People should not be used as political pawns, being forced to repeatedly retreat to the shadows of society to avoid possible deportation. We urge Congress to pass, and the President to sign, legislation that offers them a long-term solution, including a pathway to citizenship.

Also of significant concern are the proposed limitations to migrants' access to asylum in the United States, including arbitrary caps on asylum applications, restrictions on where migrants can request asylum, and rollbacks to the right of due process for Central American minors. Such policies are contrary to our Catholic faith, which calls us to welcome the stranger, and to our values as a country, which boasts a long tradition of providing refuge to those facing persecution.

As Pope Francis challenges us, "a change of attitude towards migrants and refugees is needed on the part of everyone, moving away from attitudes of defensiveness and fear, indifference and marginalization – all typical of a throwaway culture – towards attitudes based on a culture of encounter, the only culture capable of building a better, more just and fraternal world." (Address to International Forum on Migration and Peace, 2017) In this light, which is the light of the Gospel, it is our moral duty to ensure that our country's policies recognize the human dignity of migrants and welcome them as our fellow children of God.

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