CMSM Statement on Immigration Reform Proposals

SILVER SPRING, MD (February 4, 2013). The Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) appreciates the formulation of the bipartisan proposal by eight Senators and the speech by President Obama on immigration reform.

Who is in most urgent need? This is a central question that arises from a Gospel perspective on immigration.

From this orientation, we applaud those parts of the proposals for immigration reform that include a pathway to citizenship for the approximately 11 million undocumented persons in this country, the intention to more quickly reunite separated families, the protection of the rights of workers, and streamlining of the legal immigration process.

From this orientation, we also see areas for growth in the proposals.

- The first area is to **shift the moral emphasis** in these proposals from U.S. interest, i.e. self-interest writ large, to put an at least equal, if not greater, emphasis on those who are in urgent need, the human dignity of all people, and on the common good. The following areas for growth will more easily make sense with a shift in our moral lens, and we will all become better people.

- The second area is the need to specify and offer provisions to **address root causes** of illegal immigration. Some of these root causes include a lack of living wage jobs in the countries of origin, trade policies, fear of violence, and the over-long wait (5-20 yrs.) to be reunited with their families in the United States. Without addressing root causes, we will not transform the conflict and it will simply manifest itself in other ways in the future.

- The third area is the need to **restore due process protections** lost in the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act. For example, we need to restore protections such as judicial discretion in deportation hearings and freedom from arbitrary and family-separating detention.
• The fourth area is the need to re-imagine “border security” in terms of its importance, what it entails, and how we enact it. Security primarily develops from building trust, cooperation, and addressing basic human needs. Thus, proposed provisions to require certification of border security before enacting the path to citizenship is unjust to those in urgent need. Further, this approach is at best a distraction from true, lasting security if done in the present retributive justice framework (i.e., detention and deportation) rather than primarily from a restorative justice framework, which would focus on the harm to relationships and how to heal.

• The fifth area is the need to avoid perpetuating the “brain-drain” from struggling countries illustrated by the proposals that make it easier for “higher skilled” workers to come to the United States and entice them to stay. We should assess our policies so that “lower skilled” workers can just as easily come to the U.S. especially if they are in urgent need, as well as ensure that if “higher skilled” workers come it does not create more problems for the sending country and hinder that country's development.

We look forward to working with policymakers and other coalitions to ensure a just, humane, and compassionate approach to immigration reform. We invite others to consider this an opportunity to grow in the virtue of hospitality, which welcomes the other, the stranger, and the ones in urgent need.

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The Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) supports and offers resources for U.S. leaders of Catholic men’s religious institutes. CMSM promotes dialogue and collaboration on issues of religious life as well as peace and justice issues with major groups in church and society. There are more than 17,000 religious priests and brothers in the United States.