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Joint Statement of the Kansas Bishops On Refugees and Immigration

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In recent years our Nation has experienced painful acts of violence and terrorism. Following the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center it has become clear that there are those outside as well as inside our borders who wish to harm us. Indeed, the majority of terrorist acts perpetrated in the United States have been home-grown. This recent history clearly reveals a pressing need to protect our citizens.

It is an important responsibility of our President and government leaders to protect the safety of the American people. It is reasonable for the new Administration to conduct a review of the current refugee vetting procedures, especially from nations where domestic unrest and instability make it difficult to conduct reliable background checks. However, our response to past and present evils must also strive to be consistent with our deeply cherished American values of welcoming refugees and immigrants that is part of the very fabric of our history and national identity.

While recognizing how essential it is that prudent measures are taken to protect the safety of American citizens, we cannot remain indifferent to the plight of refugees, many of them children, who are fleeing from war-torn nations, drug cartels, war-lords who build-up child armies, and other horrific conditions. Even a temporary suspension of our refugee programs may place many innocent lives at risk. This is why it is incumbent upon the Administration to put in place as soon as possible an improved vetting process that protects the safety of American citizens while at the same time being compassionate and generous in welcoming refugees from the very places where their lives are most at risk.

With regard to our immigration policies, there is broad consensus that undocumented immigrants who are members of gangs, involved with drug cartels and/or violent criminals should be deported. However, it is not true or just to characterize the majority of undocumented immigrants as violent criminals. The mass deportation of the vast majority of undocumented immigrants, who work hard and contribute positively to

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American society, will result in chaos and unrest in our communities as well as a human rights nightmare with families torn apart, children separated from parents and young people expelled from the only nation they have known.

We support measures that secure our borders, stop the flow of illegal drugs, and protect the safety of American citizens. We also applaud efforts to reform immigration laws to better serve citizens and immigrants alike. At the same time, we call upon the President to make clear, as recent statements seem to imply, that it is not his intention to increase deportations of undocumented immigrants who are hardworking and have not committed serious crimes. We urge the President and Congress to exercise their leadership, in addition to securing our borders, to develop generous and prudent immigration laws and policies that are as accommodating as possible to the individuals who wish to earn citizenship or to work legally in our country.

We are eager to assist the Administration with the re-settlement of refugees and the welcoming of immigrants. Archbishop Jose H. Gomez of Los Angeles, Vice President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, reflects the concern of a great many bishops in our nation in his statement that “our Christian mission is clear – we are called to hear the cry of the poor and we are called to open our doors to the stranger who knocks, and to seek the face of Christ who comes to us in the immigrant and refugee.”

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