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CWS applauds Obama leadership on immigration reform

Las Vegas, Nevada – As President Obama unveiled his priorities for immigration reform during a speech at Del Sol High School in Las Vegas today, humanitarian agency Church World Service publicly announced its support for the President's leadership.

The President called on Congress to enact immigration reform that would create a pathway to citizenship for individuals who are currently undocumented, including undocumented youth or 'DREAMers', fix the immigration visa system to reunite separated families, and promote the integration of newcomers. CWS has advocated for these reforms for years.

CWS board of directors member Rev. Patricia de Jong, senior minister of the First Congregational Church in Berkeley, Calif., attended the President's speech. De Jong said, "The time for immigration reform is now. Separated families cannot wait. Men, women and children who are undocumented cannot be pushed aside. The President has outlined a clear proposal for immigration reform.

"While many of the details are unknown at this point, we support President Obama and the bipartisan group of Senators in their efforts," she said. "We pray that legislation will reflect the principles of family unity and full citizenship, as opposed to the punitive, border-enforcement provisions that remain in both the President's comments and the Senate's framework."

CWS Immigration and Refugee Program Director Erol Kekic said, "A clear pathway to citizenship and repairs to the U.S. visa system must be part of a just, realistic and workable plan, as they are essential to reuniting separated families and improving the lives of countless hard-working, aspiring Americans. President Obama's speech today, following the release of a [bipartisan framework](#) for immigration reform in the U.S. Senate on Monday, marks significant momentum and shows that policy makers on all sides of the political spectrum are serious about enacting immigration reform in 2013."

As an agency that provides immigration legal services and works with the U.S. government to resettle refugees, Kekic said that CWS is particularly pleased that the President emphasized the need to prioritize family reunification and create a pathway to citizenship for those who are undocumented, as well as the President's focus on integration. But, he said, "We are disappointed in the continual focus on border and interior enforcement provisions including a mandatory employment verification system that were also mentioned in the President's speech.

"These provisions have proven detrimental to communities," said Kekic. "The United States has already spent billions of dollars on enforcement, and to what end? Last year the administration deported more individuals than ever in U.S. history, including more than 100,000 parents of U.S. citizen children.

"We do not need more enforcement. We need real solutions that can only be found in a pathway to full citizenship for our community members who are undocumented, and in visa reforms that make our immigration system more effective and timely for both family reunification and employment-based immigrants."

CWS is also working to see that certain provisions will be included in legislation to improve the lives of refugees resettled in the United States. CWS, along with its member communions and refugee

resettlement offices around the country, will build off of the momentum from the President's speech and the Senate's bipartisan framework to involve its constituency in making humane immigration reform a reality in 2013.

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