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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**USCCB CHAIR CALLS SENATE IMMIGRATION FRAMEWORK IMPORTANT
FIRST STEP, SEEKS BIPARTISAN COOPERATION FOR JUST, HUMANE
LEGISLATION**

*An important first step in process and tone, says Archbishop Gomez
Promises bishops' support for system to protect human dignity, homeland simultaneously
Plan gives hope to millions of fellow human beings*

WASHINGTON—Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration, welcomed principles set forth by a group of eight U.S. Senators as a blueprint for reform of our nation's immigration system.

“I welcome the introduction of a bipartisan framework to help guide Congress on immigration reform,” Archbishop Gomez said January 28. “It is an important first step in the process and sets a bipartisan tone.”

The framework released by the “Group of Eight” working group would include a path to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented in the nation. It also would reduce family backlogs in the immigration system, which requires family members to wait years to reunite with their loved ones.

“It is vital that the framework includes a path to citizenship, so that undocumented immigrants can come out of the shadows and into the light and have a chance to become Americans,” Archbishop Gomez said. “It gives hope to millions of our fellow human beings.”

Archbishop Gomez noted that the framework leaves room for improvement, as it fails to restore due process protections to immigrants lost in the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) or address the root causes of migration, such as the absence of living-wage employment in sending communities or protection for refugees fleeing persecution.

Nevertheless, he pledged the support of the USCCB in pushing sound immigration legislation forward and working with Congress to create an immigration system which respects basic human rights and dignity while also ensuring the integrity of our borders.

“A reformed system can protect human dignity and the homeland at the same time,” he concluded.

In their 2003 pastoral letter, “Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope,” the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) outlined several policy goals for immigration reform, many of which are consistent with the framework outlined today by the U.S. Senate:

- A path to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented in the nation;
- The protection and enhancement of the family-based immigration system, including the reduction in backlogs and shortening of waiting times for husbands and wives and their families,
- A program which allows low-skilled migrant workers to enter and work in the United States legally and safely and includes appropriate wage and worker protections;
- The restoration of due process protections for immigrants removed by the 1996 Illegal Immigrant Responsibility Act; and
- Policies which address the root causes, or push factors, of irregular migration, such as the absence of living wage jobs in sending communities and persecution.

More information can be found at www.justiceforimmigrants.org.

Keywords: immigration, U.S. bishops, “Strangers No Longer,” Archbishop José Gomez, Committee on Migration, Justice for Immigrants

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