

## Necessary Elements for Just Comprehensive Immigration Reform

### Element 2: Family-Based Immigration Reform

**Background:** As the U.S. Congress and President Obama look to overhaul immigration policy in the coming year, it is important for any successful comprehensive immigration reform bill to include family-based immigration reform. Under the current system immediate family members of legal permanent residents (LPRs) must wait as long as 10 years to legally join their loved ones.

**Issue:** While many immigrants' rights advocates support the promotion of family-based immigration policies that help reunite and keep families together, some on Capitol Hill want to reduce the number of visas available for family members or eliminate the family-based categories altogether and replace it with a Canadian-style "point" system.

**Position of the United States of Catholic Bishop:** The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops advocates for comprehensive immigration reform that reflects family-based immigration law principles with a focus on family reunification. Family unity represents a cornerstone of immigration law, and is evidenced in legislative provisions and judicial interpretations throughout American history.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, families and the unity and sanctity of the family are an integral part of the Catholic teachings, as evidenced by the January 2003 pastoral statement, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, which notes that any just immigration reform proposal should include changes to the family-based immigration system to reduce waiting times for family reunification. For this reason, the USCCB believes that the family-based system should be reformed to reduce the current backlogs in family categories, reclassify spouses and minor children of legal permanent residences as immediate relatives, and should include humanitarian considerations for families.

#### Recommendations:

- Temporarily decrease Permanent Visas ("Green Cards") in order to clear Family Backlogs
- Classify spouses and children of LPRs as immediate relatives, removing the cap on annual visas.
- Increase the per-country limits on annual visa quotas in this category.
- Recapture unused visas and roll-over the remaining unused visas into the next year.

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<sup>1</sup> Could statutes and case(s) - probably using the ones listed in the amicus brief.