



## UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

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July 22, 2024

Dear Senator/Representative:

We write on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Migration and Committee on International Justice and Peace to express our support for the "Stateless Protection Act of 2024" (S. 3987/H.R. 7755), which was introduced in both chambers of Congress earlier this year. Motivated by our belief that each person is endowed by God with an inherent dignity that confers certain "universal, inviolable, and inalienable" rights,<sup>1</sup> the USCCB is deeply concerned for those who have been deprived of the most basic of political rights—their national identity. This concern has only been heightened by recent and alarming abuses witnessed in places such as Nicaragua, where Catholic clergy and laypersons have specifically been targeted by the state and stripped of their citizenship.<sup>2</sup>

Under international law, a stateless person is defined as one who is not considered to be a national of any state under the operation of its law.<sup>3</sup> An individual may become stateless for a myriad of reasons, such as deprivation of citizenship in times of war, persecution or discrimination, or having been forcibly displaced prior to being able to complete the administrative requirements for citizenship under a given country's laws.

The U.S. Supreme Court held in the 1958 case *Trop v. Dulles* that a person without a state experiences the "total destruction of the individual's status in organized society. It is a form of punishment more primitive than torture. . . [that] strips the citizen of his status in the national and international political community. His very existence is at the sufferance of the country in which he happens to find himself. While any one country may accord him some rights and, presumably, as long as he remained in this country, he would enjoy the limited rights of an alien, no country need do so, because he is stateless. . . . In short, [he] has lost the right to have rights."<sup>4</sup> Consequences of statelessness can include a lack of legal protection, limited or no access to health care, education, and registration of birth, infringements on the rights to marry and own property, and an increased vulnerability to human trafficking.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, no. 66 (1963).

<sup>2</sup> Press Release, USCCB President Acknowledges Hope and Charity Amidst the Darkness Besetting the Catholic Church of Nicaragua (Feb. 21, 2023), <https://www.usccb.org/news/2023/usccb-president-acknowledges-hope-and-charity-amidst-darkness-besetting-catholic-church>.

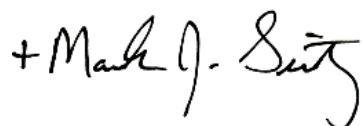
<sup>3</sup> Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, art. I, Sept. 28, 1954, 360 U.N.T.S. 117.

<sup>4</sup> *Trop v. Dulles*, 356 U.S. 86, 101–02 (1958).

The plight of stateless persons has thus far gone unaddressed in federal law. And yet, the estimated number of stateless persons in the United States exceeds 200,000.<sup>5</sup> The Stateless Protection Act is a much-needed step forward. If enacted, this bill would define “stateless person” for the first time in U.S. law, afford protection to stateless persons through a new form of relief and path to permanent residency known as Stateless Protected Status, and support initiatives aimed at preventing statelessness and related human rights violations.

In his 2018 message for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Pope Francis reminded leaders that “the statelessness which migrants and refugees sometimes fall into can easily be avoided with the adoption of ‘nationality legislation that is in conformity with the fundamental principles of international law.’”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, we urge you to support the Stateless Protection Act in order to advance the fundamental right of each person to a nationality and the opportunities it provides for full participation in society.

Sincerely,



Most Reverend Mark J. Seitz  
Bishop of El Paso  
Chairman, USCCB Committee on Migration



Most Reverend A. Elias Zaidan  
Bishop of the Maronite Eparchy of Our  
Lady of Lebanon  
Chairman, USCCB Committee on  
International Justice and Peace

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<sup>5</sup> DONALD KERWIN, DANIELA ALULEMA, MICHAEL NICHOLSON, & ROBERT WARREN, STATELESS IN THE UNITED STATES: A STUDY TO ESTIMATE AND PROFILE THE US STATELESS POPULATION (2020), <https://cmsny.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/StatelessnessReportFinal.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> This was reaffirmed through the Holy See’s “Twenty Action Points for Responding to Refugees and Migrants”, available at <https://holyseemission.org/contents/statements/5a2716362f88c.php> (calling on states to “[e]nact legislation granting adequate protection and standards of treatment in respect of rights and freedoms as established by international conventions addressing statelessness and human rights treaties and provisions relevant to the right to a nationality”).