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**ENGLISH SPEAKING CONFERENCE OF THE ORDER OF FRIARS
MINOR**

COMMISSION ON JUSTICE, PEACE & THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

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January 8, 2013

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

At the request of our leadership, we the Animators (Directors) for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation of the Franciscan Friars in the United States, appeal to you to advance comprehensive immigration reform. Immigration is in our nation's DNA. The vast majority of people who make up this nation today either have come from elsewhere themselves, or their recent or remote ancestors have. Our own Franciscan history in the United States also is tied to immigration. Our friars helped to settle Saint Augustine, Florida in 1565, and were among the first immigrants in New Mexico in the 1580s and Arizona in the early 1600s. In the 1700s under the leadership of Father Junipero Serra, our friars helped establish the cities of San Diego, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Our friars accompanied the various immigrant groups that came to the United States in the 1800s and 1900s, whether Irish, German, Italian, Polish, or Hungarian. More recently, people from Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Europe have come to our nation to make a home, and the influx continues today. Franciscan friars from around the world have followed these immigrants here to minister to them. Today our friars shepherd millions of American citizens and immigrants in over 220 locations in 32 states and the District of Columbia.

The history of immigration in our country has been mixed. In our darker moments we have seen quotas that have stopped our country from responding to the humanitarian needs of those facing persecution or economic hardship. When we have been at our best we have been a refuge of welcome allowing people to bring their energy and dynamism to build a better life for their families and our nation. Today's world presents similar challenges. People are suffering in the face of severe poverty, environmental disasters, political instability, corruption, violence and persecution, and see the United States as a place of opportunity and hope, as did many of our immigrant ancestors. We need to develop a response that will allow the U.S. to reasonably welcome those yearning for a better and freer life. We need to examine and change our current legal structure for immigration.

While we recognize the importance of laws, the enforcement of laws is an insufficient way to solve the issues around immigration. Furthermore, many of today's laws are unjust and in need of revision. We request a comprehensive reform of our government's policy since the current piece-meal approach does not suffice. The political will required to make the needed changes to ease the sufferings of immigrants can only be mustered once, and that time has come. Do not fail us in this moment. A just, humane and comprehensive immigration reform demands you work to:

- 1) Expand opportunities to reunite families, the nucleus of society. Many U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents endure years of separation from family members. Reduce the backlog for visas for family members and increase the number of available visas in order to bring together loved ones who have been separated.
- 2) Reform the Temporary Worker Program. Foreign laborers are needed for the U.S. work-force, but they must be protected from exploitation. Give foreign workers the ability to have their family members join them and work as well; to move within the U.S.; to visit their homelands without

forfeiting their status; to change employers; to be protected by the same labor laws that protect U.S. workers; and to have their basic civil rights recognized and protected, including the ability to bring action in federal court. Do not allow wages paid to temporary workers to undercut U.S. workers. Establish a means to test that such labor does not harm U.S. workers.

- 3) Establish paths to legalization. Give unauthorized immigrants a means to legalize their status. This path to legalization becomes the first step in a reasonable process for those who choose to move towards full citizenship.
- 4) Restore due process to immigrants. It is proper that the rule of law should be in place, but existing laws need to be just. Put a stop to the detention of immigrants for months without charges, secret hearings, ethnic profiling and many other draconian tactics that offend human dignity and compromise the right of due process that should be extended to all.
- 5) Reform the process for asylum seekers. Ease the criteria for those seeking asylum, and find ways other than incarceration to monitor them while their cases are pending. Find ways to protect our nation from terrorists without persecuting those who come seeking refuge with lengthy incarcerations.
- 6) Develop realistic and sustainable mechanisms for welcoming future immigrants. Without a set of workable mechanisms to address the U.S.' capacity for immigrants and the way in which immigrants are welcomed, any comprehensive immigration reform that is passed will be incomplete and unsustainable.
- 7) Decrease global poverty. Many come to the United States because the situation in their country is untenable. Take a broad approach and aid access to education, foster political stability and integrity, sponsor fair trade in poverty stricken countries, and foster character formation, rather than focusing narrowly on population control.

The Judeo-Christian ethic, on which our nation was founded, includes prophetically reminding government leaders to look after the widow, the orphaned, and the stranger. We as Franciscans and Roman Catholics, knowing firsthand the experience of immigrants, urge you to hear our appeal for the strangers who come to our land. May God give you understanding and wisdom to implement laws and policies that promote the common good of our nation and its immigrants.

Peace and All Good,

Animators of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation of the Franciscan Friars in the United States

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