



**Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory**

**Press Conference Calling for Immigration Reform**

**Martin Luther King Center, August 11, 2009**

"I am here today to join Congressman Hank Johnson, Chief Richard Pennington, and Jiles Ship in calling for comprehensive immigration reform. The U.S. Catholic Bishops have been in the forefront of calling for comprehensive reform for several years now. Every day in our social service programs, hospitals, and parishes, we see the human consequences of a failed system, in which families are separated, migrant workers are exploited by human smugglers and unscrupulous employers, and human lives end in horrible deaths in the American desert. Immigration is not simply an economic or social issue, but ultimately a humanitarian issue which impacts human dignity and human life.

I am honored to join with law enforcement representatives today as a unified voice in calling for reform of our national immigration system. Our law enforcement personnel, both here in Atlanta and nationally, perform the difficult duty of protecting our neighborhoods, towns, and cities, and are to be commended for their service. As I believe they may agree, however, enforcement of our laws is only one side of the equation. Laws also must be created that are workable and just, and must emphasize legality over illegality.

Under our current immigration system, illegality--which is not good for the individual or the society--must be replaced with legality--more specifically, more legal avenues must be created so migration is safe and orderly, and those in the shadows now should be given legal status so they can come out of the shadows, identify themselves to the government, and begin to become integrated into American society.

**As a great nation and as a country of immigrants, we can no longer accept a status quo that tolerates a permanent underclass of human beings without rights and the opportunity to fully contribute to the life of the nation. That is not what America stands for and certainly is not what has made us a nation of equal justice under the law.**

I call upon the President and all of our elected officials to begin deliberations on a comprehensive immigration bill as soon as possible, so that our fellow human beings, who work hard to support their families, can live without fear or prejudice.