

USCCB Migration Chairman, Archbishop Gomez, Troubled Over Reports of New Immigrant Deportation Raids

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WASHINGTON—Bishop Eusebio Elizondo, auxiliary bishop of Seattle and chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Migration expressed deep concern over reports that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) will soon begin a month-long series of immigrant deportation raids. Incoming committee chairman, Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, also voiced such concern.

Like the ICE enforcement actions conducted in early January, the upcoming operation is expected to focus on undocumented Central American mothers and children.

While recognizing the federal government's role in upholding immigration laws, Bishop Elizondo warns against the underlying rationale behind the ICE enforcement actions. "Sending women and children back to Central America will not serve as an effective deterrent to migration because this is a humanitarian crisis and individuals from the region are being forced to flee for their lives," Bishop Elizondo said. "The mission of the Committee on Migration—and USCCB Migration & Refugee Services—is to protect these vulnerable populations."

Archbishop Gomez also noted that "The raids are yet another depressing sign of the failed state of American immigration policy." While ICE is reportedly expected to target individuals with deportation orders, many of these cases raise due process concerns. Data shows many of the families with outstanding removal orders were issued such orders in their absence from court or without legal representation. As Bishop Elizondo noted in a January 2016 letter to Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson, the objection is to "the removal of any migrants who were apprehended without first confirming that they received actual meaningful opportunities to present their asylum claims at hearings in immigration court."

"These operations spark panic among our parishes," said Bishop Elizondo. "No person, migrant or otherwise, should have to fear leaving their home to attend church or school. No person should have to fear being torn away from their family and returned to danger."

Bishop Elizondo and Archbishop Gomez remind the administration and ICE that enforcement actions that cause families to live in constant fear run contrary to long-standing American values and challenge the God-given dignity of every person.

The January 2016 letter can be found at: <http://www.usccb.org/about/migration-policy/bishops-statements/upload/Letter-to-Jeh-Johnson-on-Deportations.pdf>.

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