

U.S., Mexico bishops urge political leaders to 'welcome, protect' migrants

WASHINGTON (CNS) – Catholic bishops who head the U.S. and Mexico dioceses along the border that separates them, along with the chairman of the U.S. bishops' migration committee, issued a joint statement April 1 urging governments, political leaders and civil society to “work together to welcome, protect, promote and integrate migrants.”

The prelates also called on these leaders to “work with other countries in the region to eliminate conditions that compel their citizens to resort to dangerous and irregular migration.”

They issued the statement in response to a humanitarian crisis that has been underway at the U.S.-Mexico border for weeks as hundreds of migrants from Central America and many other places arrive each day seeking refuge in the United States.

The bishops said they “witness daily the dilemma that our migrant sisters and brothers face. For most, the decision to migrate is not motivated by an indifference toward their homeland or the pursuit of economic prosperity; it is a matter of life or death. The situation is all the more difficult for children.”

Challenges faced at the border, with so many seeking refuge in the United States, require humanitarian solutions, they said.

“Undoubtedly, nations have the right to maintain their borders. This is vital to their sovereignty and self-determination,” the bishops wrote. At the same time, “there is a shared responsibility of all nations to preserve human life and provide for safe, orderly, and humane immigration,

including the right to asylum,” they said.

The bishops also quoted Pope Francis: “Persistent and courageous dialogue does not make headlines, but quietly helps the world to live much better than we imagine.”

They said family unity must be a vital part of any response to what is happening at the border and asked that “special attention be given to particularly vulnerable populations, such as children.”

“We strongly urge that structures be put in place and reforms in our laws be made to both promote a welcoming culture for our sisters and brothers and respect the sovereignty and safety of our countries,” they added.

The U.S. and Mexican bishops said they pledge to continue to help their governments’ efforts to protect and care for families and individuals who feel compelled to migrate. To accomplish this, they said they commit to the “ongoing work of Catholic organizations at the border and elsewhere, which are generously tended to by lay people, consecrated persons, and the clergy.”

They also noted that their statement should be taken in the context of when it is offered – during Holy Week.

“We feel encouraged to keep going, helping migrants, conscious that while the way ahead is long and arduous, it is not impossible if we journey together,” they said.

The letter was signed by the following U.S. prelates: Auxiliary Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville of Washington, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Migration; Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, Texas; Bishop James A. Tamayo of Laredo, Texas; Bishop Edward J. Weisenburger of Tucson, Arizona; Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Brownsville, Texas; Bishop Peter Baldacchino of Las Cruces, New Mexico; Bishop Robert W. McElroy of San Diego; Bishop

Michael J. Sis of San Angelo, Texas; and Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller of San Antonio.

The following Mexican bishops signed the letter: Bishop José Guadalupe Torres Campos of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua; Bishop Jesús José Herrera Quiñones of Nuevo Casas Grandes, Chihuahua; Bishop Alonso Garza Treviño of Piedras Negras, Coahuila; Bishop Enrique Sánchez Martínez of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas; Bishop Eugenio Andrés Lira Rugarcía of Matamoros, Tamaulipas; and Bishop Hilario González García of Saltillo, Coahuila.