

February 23, 2006

The Honorable Michael Chertoff
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Chertoff:

We are writing to request that the Department of Homeland Security adopt a policy to provide assistance to all non-citizens and to suspend immigration enforcement measures in the wake of natural or man-made disasters. Such a policy would be akin to the kind of protection that the United States extends to certain country-specific populations through its Temporary Protected Status (TPS) program. We urge that all disaster survivors, including the undocumented and their families, be allowed to participate fully in government-led emergency programs.

Following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, many non-citizens remained underground because they feared immigration enforcement measures. To exacerbate matters, some who came forward were threatened with arrest and others were placed in removal proceedings. The failure of non-citizens to participate in public health and disaster relief efforts clearly impedes those efforts. It also offends basic humanitarian principles to deny persons access to the institutions and programs that are central to their survival.

A policy to serve all victims of disaster (irrespective of immigration status) and a commitment to relax immigration enforcement measures, would facilitate compliance by immigrants with authorities at times that demand unity. It would provide the government with a more accurate sense of the need for services. It would contribute to the safety of all Americans in affected areas. In our view, such a policy is indispensable to an effective and humane disaster-relief system. We urge you to adopt such a policy.

Sincerely,



Most Reverend Nicholas DiMarzio, Ph.D., D.D.
Bishop of Brooklyn
Chairman, CLINIC Board of Directors



Most Reverend Gerald Barnes
Bishop of San Bernardino
Chair, USCCB Committee on Migration