



CONFÉRENCE DES ÉVÊQUES CATHOLIQUES DU CANADA
CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

Ottawa
25 November 2010

The Honourable Jason Kenney
Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism
Citizenship and Immigration Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 1L1

Dear Minister Kenney:

The Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops wishes to express its concerns regarding Bill C -49, an Act to amend *The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, *The Balanced Refugee Reform Act* and *The Maritime Transportation Security Act*.

The short title of this legislation is the *Preventing Human Smugglers from Abusing Canada's Immigration System Act*. Although nations have a legitimate right to counter human smugglers because of grave abuses, notably human trafficking, they also have a duty to take measures that respect the rights of refugees. However, many of the clauses of this legislation may contravene international law and Canadian law, and penalize the refugees more than the smugglers. The exceptional measures taken by refugees to flee persecution and violence in their countries of origin are motivated more by distress than by bad intentions.

This legislation risks creating serious obstacles to sponsorship and family reunification. Furthermore, it authorizes the detention of refugees for long periods and restricts the right of appeal, which would be contrary to sections 31(2) and 32 (1) (2) of the 1951 *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* signed by Canada.

In our Pastoral Letter on Immigration and the Protection of Refugees released on 15 January 2006, the Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops stated that "it is a fundamental inversion of values, according to Catholic teaching, when laws and policies place national interests and security before human dignity."

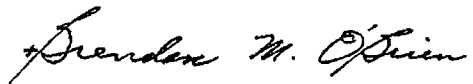
In his message for the 97th World Day of Migrants and Refugees (2011), Pope Benedict XVI notes that the international community has committed itself to protect refugees and forced migrants and that "Respect of their rights, as well as the legitimate concern for security and social coherence, foster a stable and harmonious coexistence."

We are, therefore, requesting that you reconsider the clauses of Bill C-49 that penalize refugees.

In addition, should you deem it necessary, we stand ready to offer our collaboration through Catholic agencies working with immigrants and refugees in order to find a just solution for all concerned.

Thank you for your attention to our request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brendan M. O'Brien".

Archbishop Brendan M. O'Brien
Archbishop of Kingston
Chairman
Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

On behalf of
Bishop François Lapierre, P.M.É.
Bishop of Saint-Hyacinthe
Bishop David Motiuk
Eparchial Bishop of Edmonton
Bishop Valéry Vienneau
Bishop of Bathurst