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Statement of Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R., Archbishop of Newark, On Wednesday's Executive Actions on Immigration

I understand the desire for every American to be assured of safe borders and freedom from terrorism. The federal government should continue a prudent policy aimed at protecting citizens.

I also understand and heed the call of God, who through Moses told the people of Israel: "You shall not oppress an alien; you well know how it feels to be an alien, since you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt" (Ex 23:9). Jesus asks His disciples to go further, calling on us to recognize Him in the stranger: "Whatsoever you did to the least of my brothers, you did to me" (Mt. 25:40).

Wednesday's Executive Actions do not show the United States to be an open and welcoming nation. They are the opposite of what it means to be an American.

Closing borders and building walls are not rational acts. Mass detentions and wholesale deportation benefit no one; such inhuman policies destroy families and communities.

In fact, threatening the so-called "sanctuary cities" with the withdrawal of federal funding for vital services such as healthcare, education and transportation will not reduce immigration. It only will harm all good people in those communities.

I am the grandson of immigrants and was raised in a multicultural neighborhood in southwest Detroit. Throughout my life as a priest and bishop in the United States, I have lived and worked in communities that were enriched by people of many nationalities, languages and faiths. Those communities were strong, hard-working, law-abiding, and filled with affection for this nation and its people.

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Here in Newark, we are in the final steps of preparing to welcome 51 refugees from Syria, Iraq Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This is only the latest group of people whom Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese has helped to resettle during the past 40 years. This current group of refugees has waited years for this moment and already has been cleared by the federal government.

They have complied with all of the stringent requirements of a vetting process that is coordinated by the Department of Homeland Security. Catholic Charities, assisted by parishes and parishioners of the Archdiocese, will help them establish homes, jobs and new lives so that they can contribute positively to life in northern New Jersey. When this group is settled, we hope to welcome others.

This nation has a long and rich history of welcoming those who have sought refuge because of oppression or fear of death. The Acadians, French, Irish, Germans, Italians, Poles, Hungarians, Jews and Vietnamese are just a few of the many groups over the past 260 years whom we have welcomed and helped to find a better, safer life for themselves and their children in America.

Even when such groups were met by irrational fear, prejudice and persecution, the signature benevolence of the United States of American eventually triumphed.

That confident kindness is what has made, and will continue to make, America great.

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