

REMARKS TO USCCB GENERAL ASSEMBLY NOVEMBER 13, 2019



CATHOLIC LEGAL
IMMIGRATION
NETWORK, INC.

Anna Gallagher
Executive Director, CLINIC

Thank you, Bishop Vann. I appreciate this opportunity to share information on CLINIC and our work at the border.

CLINIC trains and supports immigration legal services agencies across the country. We advocate for humane immigration policies. We provide legal representation for immigrant religious workers. We also support naturalization and integration, including with a project through the Catholic Campaign for Human Development to help train immigrant leaders in combatting poverty.

I came to CLINIC after a career that brought me to Guatemala, Spain, Ireland and back to the United States. As the child of immigrants from the West of Ireland who arrived here with next to nothing, I grew up with stories and songs of exile and separation. I understand why people leave their homes. Despite poverty and limited formal education, my parents arrived with many resources: hard work, faith, resilience and a deep respect for family and community. They taught my brothers and me to love this country, like so many immigrants before and after them.

Upon joining CLINIC in February, I visited the border to assess the situation, in anticipation of our work there, and also to represent a separated mother from Honduras in her deportation case. Even with my long experience, I had never seen misery and desperation like that experienced by thousands of migrant men, women and children asylum seekers living at our Southern border.

I saw a world that is hard to understand and accept given our country's resources and values. I saw people crowded into shelters with inadequate food and sanitary services. I met a 25-year old mother with 5-year old daughter, who had fled beatings and abuse. On a street in Tijuana in the late spring, a man tried to steal her little girl.

I saw hundreds of Mexicans who had fled cartel violence, living on the streets, waiting for a turn to ask for asylum. When I accompanied a group of asylum seekers to the port of entry, we were shouted at and ridiculed by a Customs and Border Protection officer. The oldest in this group of 18 people was 24, the youngest a two-month old baby. They all had fled violence in their home towns and could not return.

More than 60,000 men, women and children are being forced by this administration to wait for months in Mexico before they can ask for asylum in the United States. Human rights organizations and the press regularly report on the dangers these men, women and children face every day while they wait.

Our government is violating international and U.S. law, which states that a person fleeing persecution who arrives at our border should be admitted and permitted to apply for asylum. Asylum applicants can be detained if they pose a threat or a flight risk after they enter. Otherwise, they can — and should be — released to the support of family, community and access to counsel while they await final processing of their applications for protection.

With the encouragement of CLINIC's board, border bishops, and many of our partners, this summer we started a new project in Ciudad Juarez — the Estamos Unidos Asylum Project — to respond to the urgent legal needs of those stranded in Mexico. There should be a flyer about the project in your packets. It provides legal support to people applying for asylum and waiting for hearings and interviews in their cases. Our staff and volunteers from our network

and beyond provide Know Your Rights presentations. They also carry out legal consultations and explain options to the migrants. They represent some in immigration court.

In Ciudad Juarez, no two days are alike. The practices employed by U.S. border agents change from day to day. Processing times vary. There is no standard procedure to admit Mexican asylum seekers. They simply wait on the streets, sleeping on sidewalks with their children, hoping that CBP will permit a small number to enter on any given day.

In Ciudad Juarez alone, 16,000-plus migrants wait to seek protection in the United States. CLINIC and HIAS are the only organizations providing ongoing U.S. asylum assistance to the migrants in Juarez. We have had 30 volunteers with us during the last two months and are in the process of building a strong volunteer corps.

As you can imagine, our work is just a drop in the bucket. We can only represent a very small percentage of the many who need help.

By its actions, this administration has essentially eliminated asylum at our border, especially for poor black and brown people. Without skilled counsel, thousands of migrants will lose their cases, be deported and face grave danger, even death, in their home countries.

The border is not the only place where the dignity and rights of migrants are being threatened. Nationwide, millions of low-income immigrants are in critical need of legal assistance to help them keep their families together.

You know this.

You see the families in your parishes and social service programs.

They are rightly worried about:

- The potential loss of Temporary Protected Status and DACA.
- They are terrified of workplace raids.
- They fear being deported after any interaction with the police.
- They face the always-looming possibility of having their families broken apart.

Despite all of the bad news, I also see hope as I visit our affiliates in your dioceses. Affiliates do an astonishing amount of life-saving good with extremely limited resources. They accompany thousands of men, women and children as they encounter ever-changing immigration policies.

They are creative and driven to help as many people as they can, wherever necessary.

I'd like to close by making a few simple requests.

- Visit your local CLINIC affiliate, most often the Catholic Charities program providing immigration legal services. Your presence will lift their spirits as they continue swimming against the tide.
- If you don't have a legal services program in your diocese, we can help you start one.
- Speak out and make sure that your community knows that you are there to accompany them in their often-agonizing immigration struggle. I'm very grateful for Cardinal DiNardo's observations on Monday about his time at the border. Such interactions are always welcome and eye-opening.

Finally thank you again — for having the foresight and wisdom to create CLINIC. Thank you for standing with us and with the immigrants in your communities. I welcome your questions.