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John Cardinal Krol, Archbishop of Philadelphia  
President

August 16, 1973

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General Secretary

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Your Eminence:

Western Hemisphere Issue

I am pleased to let you know that the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives has sent to the floor of the House H.R. 981, legislation amending our immigration laws and providing a preference system for intending immigrants from Western Hemisphere countries.

Such a preference system is to facilitate the reunification of families and the system has been in effect for eastern hemisphere countries since 1924. This legislation, however, needs some improvement, and this was recognized by Congressman Rodino of New Jersey, Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee and sponsor of the bill, who introduced committee amendments that would provide for a ceiling of 35,000 visa numbers each for our contiguous territories, Mexico and Canada. This proposal is of vital importance from the standpoint of our international relations and family reunion.

Mr. Rodino also introduced an amendment that would grant for a temporary period special nonquota status to the unmarried sons and daughters of U.S. citizens and the spouses and unmarried sons and daughters of permanent resident aliens. We are informed that these amendments which, unfortunately, were defeated when they were proposed before the full Judiciary Committee will be reconsidered when action is taken on the bill by the entire House.

At the present time, the applicant under the numerical ceiling of the western hemisphere comes strictly on a first-come, first-served basis, without regard to his relationship to a citizen or resident alien in the United States, nor is any consideration given as to the need of his services by virtue of his occupation or profession. A backlog has arisen in the western hemisphere so that a new registrant faces a delay of nearly two years before his name is reached on the waiting list. Thus, a spouse or child of a permanent resident alien, for example, must be separated from the spouse or parent for this two year period before the family can be reunited.

The legislation proposes a ceiling for all countries of the western hemisphere, including Canada and Mexico, of 20,000 numbers annually. Last year, Mexican immigration (under the western hemisphere ceiling) amounted to 41,707, and the movement from that country is almost exclusively one of family reunion. A cut of 50 percent in this movement will have a devastating effect on the families involved, and would be a departure from the basic philosophy of family reunification, which is the foundation of our present immigration law.

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In view of the fact that there is a possibility that further action will be taken on this bill after the August recess, it would be most important that consideration be given to approaching your local representative and request support of these most needed amendments to the proposed legislation.

We are attaching a fact sheet, for your guidance on this matter, and will be glad to provide any further information that may be necessary. We will, of course, keep Your Excellency informed of further developments on this matter, which will involve the future of thousands of potential newcomers to our shores.

With cordial good wishes, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

*+ James S. Rausch*

Most Reverend James S. Rausch  
General Secretary

attachment



[ Attachment with Aug. 16, 1973 ]

SOME PROBLEMS FACING IMMIGRANT VISA APPLICANTS FROM THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE.

Prior to 1965, there was no numerical limitations on immigration from the Western Hemisphere. The Immigration Act of 1965 placed a numerical ceiling of 120,000 visas per year but provided no preference system to regulate the flow of immigrants as we have had for many years in the case of the immigrant from the Eastern Hemisphere.

The applicant from the Western Hemisphere comes strictly on a first-come-first-served basis without reference to his relationship to a citizen or resident alien in the United States nor is any consideration given as to the needs of his services by virtue of his occupation or profession. Furthermore, no provision is made for special consideration in the movement of refugees.

Because of the great demand for visas, a backlog has arisen in the Western Hemisphere and a new registrant faces a delay of nearly two years before his name is reached on the list. Thus a spouse or child of a permanent resident alien must be separated from the spouse or parent for this two year period before the family can be reunited.

In an attempt to rectify the injustices of the present law the House Subcommittee on Tuesday, July 17, reported out a bill which would impose the much needed preference system on Western Hemisphere immigration. It however provides that no country be permitted to use more than 20,000 visas from the annual numerical ceiling of 120,000 per year. While this 20,000 limitation is also contained in the Eastern Hemisphere system, it will be seriously detrimental to the movement of natives of Mexico to the United States.

In 1972, 64,000 Mexicans were admitted to the United States for permanent residence. 23,000 of this number were immediate relatives (parents of adult U.S. citizens and the spouses and unmarried minor children of U.S. citizens) who are admitted without numerical restriction. The remaining 41,000 were admitted under the Hemispheric ceiling. If a national limit of 20,000 is imposed, immigration under the Hemispheric ceiling for Mexico will be cut in half.

At the present time there are 290,000 persons registered on the Western Hemisphere waiting list. It is conservatively estimated that at least one-third of these persons are Mexicans. Another complicating factor is the presence within the United States of an estimated one million five hundred thousand illegal aliens, the majority of whom are Mexicans. A great percentage of these illegal aliens will qualify for registration under the preference system. The known demand as well as the registered demand already exceeds the number available. By placing the 20,000 limit on Mexican immigration, the situation will be complicated only further.

Since Mexican immigration is almost exclusively one of family reunion, family reunification will be further delayed, thus creating an increasing the serious concern of the Church as regards this proposed legislation.