

House bill allows asylum for illegal immigrants

By Laurie Hansen
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The House of Representatives Oct. 25 approved a bill backed by the U.S. Catholic Conference that would suspend deportation of illegal immigrants from El Salvador, Nicaragua and China.

Members of the House voted 258-162 to allow the illegal immigrants who register within nine months of the bill's enactment and who have lived in the United States since last July to be eligible to remain in the country for three years.

Under the bill, however, they would be barred from receiving most government-

funded public assistance.

The bill, which was sponsored by Sen. Dennis DeConcini, D-Ariz., Rep. Joe Moakley, D-Mass., and Rep. Bruce Morrison, D-Conn., is a "much needed response to the situation facing so many persons who have fled their countries of origin because of the situations there," said Monsignor Robert N. Lynch, USCC general secretary, in an Oct. 23 letter to members of Congress. The USCC is the public policy arm of the U.S. bishops.

The Bush administration had already deferred repatriation of Chinese nationals because of the Chinese government crackdown against pro-democracy forces in

June.

But requests for refugee status by Central Americans are treated on a case-by-case basis under which applicants must demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution if they return. Church officials have said the process has been politicized, making it easier for applicants fleeing communist nations to obtain asylum than for those from nations with right-wing military governments.

U.S. government officials, however, have argued that many Central Americans leave their nation "or economic rather than political reason," and therefore do not qualify for refugee status.

The House vote means "hope for freedom" to some 1,000 Salvadorans and Nicaraguans being held at the U.S. government detention center in Bayview, Texas, Vincentian Father Don Rickard, chaplain at the detention center, told Catholic News Service in an Oct. 26 telephone interview. Bayview is located in the Rio Grande Valley across the border from Mexico.

The inmates, who have been caught entering the United States illegally, are "very conscious they're in a desperate situation with limited options and resources," the priest said.

"They're depressed, few have money to make bond, they can't get lawyers and the Salvadorans especially don't hold out much hope for getting asylum status. Incarceration wears on the human spirit," said Father Rickard.

In South Florida, where an estimated 100,000 Nicaraguans have resettled, passage of the bill is "tremendously important ... it would be the first official recognition that we have a real Nicaraguan refugee problem, coming on the 10th anniversary of the first Nicaraguan arrivals," said Monsignor Bryan O. Walsh, director of Catholic Community Services of the Miami archdiocese.

Bills to allow Salvadorans to stay in this country until conditions in El Salvador improve have been introduced repeatedly since 1983. In recent years, the bills have included Nicaraguans.

The bill, which was before the Senate Judiciary Committee, must go to the Senate floor before it is sent to President Bush for his signature.

The bill also requires that the Justice Department designate the nationals of other countries as eligible for temporary stays in the United States if certain conditions exist in their home countries.

Duke Austin, spokesman for the Immigration and Naturalization Service, said in an Oct. 26 interview that between October 1988 and last August, 418 Salvadoran petitions for asylum were granted by INS and 12,874 were denied. Pending were 20,647 applications.

During the same period, 4,694 Nicaraguan petitions for asylum were granted and 10,149 were denied, said Austin. Pending were 21,934 applications by Nicaraguans.

Vatican's budget in the black for the first time in five years

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The Vatican's 1988 budget is in the black for the first time since 1983.

When income for the worldwide Peter's Pence collection is included, 1988 income outstripped expenses by almost \$9 million, according to Vatican figures released Oct. 26.

Previously, 1983 was the last year for which the Vatican said its income — including worldwide contributions from Catholics — covered the deficit.

Minus the Peter's Pence collection, the statistics show a 1988 shortfall of \$44 million. The 1988 Peter's Pence collection, which the Vatican said was used to cover the deficit, totaled \$52.9 million.

The figures were contained in a Vatican statement that thanked "the bishops, priests, religious and faithful who, sensitive to the needs of the Holy See, have generously answered the appeal" to contribute to the Peter's Pence collections.

The statement was released by the Vatican press office at the end of an Oct. 23-25 meeting of the council of cardinals named

by Pope John Paul II to examine Vatican finances.

Cardinal G. Emmett Carter of Toronto, a council member, told Vatican Radio Oct. 26 that for the first time the Vatican budget figures are undergoing an independent audit. The results will be sent to the world's bishops.

The Vatican statement said expenses will continue to rise because of inflation, the modernization of Vatican Radio plants and equipment, and needed repairs of Vatican buildings.

The 1988 figures showed that the Holy See, the central offices of the universal church, ran a deficit of \$57.2 million, while the Vatican City State, which administers the 108-acre independent state and its physical plant, turned a profit of \$13.2 million.

The Vatican's communications operations were responsible for over 35 percent of the Holy See deficit. *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican newspaper, had a shortfall of nearly \$5.3 million in 1988 and Vatican Radio, which does not accept advertising, had a \$15.6 million shortfall.

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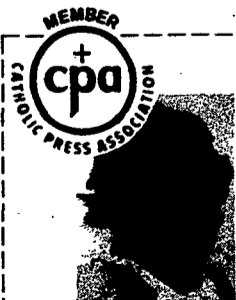
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