

CHAIRMAN OF THE USCCB COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION AND BISHOPS FROM TEXAS DIOCESES ISSUE STATEMENT ON THE DEATH OF JAKELIN CAAL MAQUIN

December 18, 2018

WASHINGTON--On December 8, seven-year-old Jakelin Caal Maquin died in the custody of United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP). She and her father had been apprehended the evening of December 6 in a remote stretch of the U.S./Mexico border in Antelope Wells, New Mexico. Most Reverend Joe S. Vásquez, Bishop of Austin, and Chairman of the USCCB Committee on Migration, along with Most Reverend Mark J. Seitz, Bishop of El Paso and Most Reverend Gerald Kicanas, Administrator of the Diocese of Las Cruces, issued the following statement:

"We are extremely distressed at the news of seven-year-old Jakelin Caal Maquin's death shortly after crossing the U.S./Mexico border with her father and turning themselves into CBP in search of asylum in the United States. Our prayers and heart-felt condolences go out to Jakelin's family. The death of a child is always a moment of great sadness, a jarring disruption of the natural order of life. From this tragedy, we must remember this profound human consequence of our failed immigration policies, including also that restrictions on the flow of asylum seekers at the border can push more families to seek entrance between ports of entry which place them at greater risk. Jakelin's death is a tragic reminder of the desperate situation that many fleeing violence, persecution, and poverty face - both in their home countries and now at our border.

We welcome the investigation of the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General. We recognize the work and commitment of CBP officers to ensure our safety, but urge CBP leadership to critically review policies regarding the care of vulnerable populations in their custody. We pledge our assistance to help CBP do so.

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas and the birth of Jesus, himself a child whose parents were told "there is no room," we continue to recognize and affirm that seeking asylum and protection is legal. As a nation, we have the obligation to receive distraught individuals and families with welcome, compassion, and humane treatment. We must heed the words of Christ that "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).
