

**Comment by the President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
on the Passing of Bill C-38 by the House of Commons**

1. With the House of Commons having passed Bill C-38 on 28 June 2005, Canadians take another unfortunate step toward eliminating civil and social recognition and appreciation for the unique importance of the committed relationship of a man and a woman in marriage.
2. The issues at stake are not only the basis and the definition of marriage as established and celebrated since time immemorial by all religions and cultures, and as inscribed in nature. What is also at risk is the future of marriage as a fundamental social institution, together with the importance that society accords the irreplaceable role of a husband and wife in conceiving and raising children. Their partnership assures a stable context for family life, continuity with past and future generations, and gender models involving both mother and father.
3. The passage of Bill C-38 by the House of Commons, like the difficulties in health care, are indications that Canadians are witnessing a dangerous deterioration of their communal values. This worrisome decline in shared concern and care for the common good is also evident in the continuing high rates of marriage breakdown, the annual number of abortions, and the declining number of births.
4. Given the political manoeuvring on Bill C-38, it is particularly troubling to note the continued refusal by certain political parties and their leaders to recognize and respect freedom of conscience and religion. Members of Parliament were forced to follow a political deadline and to vote along party lines on an issue which deeply divides and troubles Canadians. This is an ominous sign of what can be expected in future debates on the application of Bill C-38 in the provinces and territories with regard to human rights legislation and the solemnization of marriage, as well as regarding school policies on moral and social questions. The addition of several amendments to Bill C-38 does not diminish significant concerns about protecting freedom of conscience and religion which the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* identifies as among the most basic of human rights. These apprehensions were repeatedly expressed by a number of groups appearing before the Special Legislative Committee.
5. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops calls on the Senate to exercise in full its role of assuring a “second and sober” look at the proposed legislation, in order to give prudent consideration to all the various social, religious, legal and civil consequences of Bill C-38, and also in order to provide access to public hearings to as many Canadians as possible in all regions and from all walks of life, including the many ethnic cultures which have serious reservations about this proposed legislation.

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