



Resolutions To Action

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Immigration Reform and Life and Death on the Border

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The debate about immigrants and immigration law is not ultimately about the immigrants, it is about us. It is about what kind of people we will be; will we be a welcoming, kind, accepting culture, people, and country or will we continue to leave out the poor, the needy; the ones that walk with God? Will we continue to harden our hearts and exclude anyone that we believe is not one of us, or will we live up to the best of our faith and national traditions and "welcome the stranger"? (West Cosgrove, Kino Border Initiatives)

EXPERIENCE

As a participant in a recent School of the Americas Border Watch Delegation, I encountered firsthand the stories of pain, suffering, desperation, and cruelty even as I heard stories of faith, determination, and trust.

When we arrived at the US southern border we went first to the comedor (soup kitchen) in Nogales, Mexico to talk with migrants who had been recently deported from the United States. Between sobs, one young man told his story. At 19, he left home

without telling family. He wanted to protect them from drug cartels which sometimes extract money from the families of immigrants. He began his walk across the desert with two other people. One became weak and had to be left behind. He and his second companion were ultimately caught by the border

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patrol and separated. When he was deported, he came to the comedor to eat and expected to find his friend whom they had to leave behind. When he failed to find his friend, it dawned on him that the friend was most likely dead. He was inconsolable!

Later, John Heid, from the humanitarian group, "No More Deaths," took us on a desert walk following a trail made by migrants. It was hot, dry, and dangerous. We walked across gullies following

an old streambed trying to avoid the thorns, brambles, and cacti. The sun became hotter and we were each glad for the water we carried. After almost two hours, we happily turned toward the van we had left parked near the road. As we got closer to our goal, a pickup drove past and then returned to investigate. Two members of the Fish and Wildlife cadre got out of their truck to talk with us. They are authorized to arrest. Fortunately, they recognized John and the conversation was amiable. It so easily could have gone differently.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS

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Because of the increased use of sophisticated surveillance systems, the arming of more than 21,000 border guards and the erecting of almost 700 miles of steel 25-foot-high fencing, more than 5,000 lives have been lost since the late 1990s.

US Border Patrol agents have killed at least 15 people since January 2010. Jose Antonio Elena Rodriguez, aged 16, was one of the victims. Jose Antonio had been visiting his girlfriend and died on a sidewalk in Nogales, Mexico; his body riddled with 11 bullets, seven in his back. He was felled by “bullets fired by agents in the United States.” He was carrying only his cellphone. Unfortunately, Jose’s death is not the only example of US agents killing residents of Mexico by firing across the border.

As the border becomes increasingly militarized, migrants are forced to walk through the Sonora desert. Last year alone, 179 bodies were found in the desert around Tucson. There is no way of knowing how many more died and were never found. Volunteers from around the globe are living in tents and driving four-wheel drive vehicles through the desert heat, hoping to find those afflicted by heat stroke and dehydration before the desert claims them. Humanitarian groups leave gallon bottles of water along the migrant trails. If the water is found by the border patrol, it will be dumped out onto the ground. That is the policy.

REFLECTION

US border protection policies currently in place are a major factor in the deaths of many unarmed men, women, and children.

Since January 2010, no border patrol agent has been held accountable for the

injury or death of migrants they have encountered. No charges have been filed and the agency will not say what, if any, disciplinary actions have been taken. Rocks thrown from the southern side of the border are met by bullets fired from the north. This seems to

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many, including the Mexican Embassy in Washington, DC, a disproportionate response.

According to a report, “Culture of Cruelty,” produced by “No More Deaths,” the border patrol has three distinct practices that “increase the risk of death in the desert and constitute their own forms of abuse”:

- Funneling migrants to deadly border regions and dispersing migrant groups in the desert.
- Impeding search and rescue attempts by withholding information or giving false information to volunteers patrolling the desert for migrants in need.
- Vandalizing life-saving resources such as water, food, and blankets as a matter of policy.

ACTION

A national debate about immigration reform is currently underway and the Senate recently passed S. 744 the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act. While the bill contains provisions lauded by many immigration proponents, including a path to citizenship, it also contains measures that threaten border communities. The

bill will dramatically increase spending on border security, add an additional 20,000 border agents and extend border fencing. Border communities are already stressed and people are already dying unnecessarily. Attention now turns to the House of Representatives as they debate immigration reform.

1. Learn more about life on the border and support those ministering there.
 - Shootings by Agents Increase Border Tension (New York Times: 6/11/2013 www.nytimes.com/2013/06/11/us/shootings-by-agents-increase-border-tensions.html)
 - No More Deaths, www.nomoredeaths.org/Abuse-Report-Culture-of-Cruelty/View-catagory.html
 - Kino Border Initiatives is a Jesuit-sponsored program with offices and outreach in Nogales, Arizona and Mexico. Learn more at www.kinoborderinitiative.org
2. Follow the debate in the US House of Representatives and commit to being actively involved in trying to shape the outcome of immigration reform legislation.
 - www.justiceforimmigrants.org
 - www.interfaithimmigration.org
3. Take action.
 - Commit to calling your US Representative regularly during the debate.
 - Share your thoughts about immigration reform.
 - Write a letter-to-the editor.
 - Author an opinion piece for your local paper.
 - Schedule an appointment with someone in your US Representative’s district office.