

Texas-Mexico Border Fence

The Texas Catholic Conference *opposes federal and state funding for a fence along the Texas-Mexico border.*

As pastors, we witness the consequences of a failed system every day in the eyes of migrants who come to our parish doors in search of assistance. We are shepherds to communities, both along the border and in the interior of the nation, which are impacted by immigration. Most tragically, we witness the loss of life at points along our southern border when migrants, desperate to find employment to support themselves and their families, perish in the desert. (*United States Bishops, Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*)

A Texas Bishop Speaks:

"For a great many people living in the Rio Grande Valley building a wall along the border would not mean protection from the outside world, but instead would create a barrier between families, friends, and businesses. We oppose the construction of the wall because one-dimensional solutions may be simple, but they are often illusions and can make things worse. Immigration policies that begin and end at our borders will not be successful. "



-Bishop Raymundo Peña , Diocese of Brownsville

Church Teaching

- ★ As the Bishop of a diocese on the border between Mexico and the United States, I bring the experience of living side by side as a neighbor with Mexico. We who live along the border see our southern neighbors as allies and partners. For many U. S. citizens, they are also members of our family. While we respect the sovereignty of Mexico and the United States, our lived experience is one of a supportive community. People work, shop, eat and attend private schools on both sides of the border. It is a relationship of mutual respect and understanding. For these reasons, the Catholic Church in Texas holds a strong interest in the welfare of immigrants and how our nation and indeed our state welcomes newcomers from all lands. We respect the federal role of protecting the borders of the United States and regulating the flow of immigrants. However, the current immigration system, which can lead to family separation, suffering, and even death, is morally unacceptable and must be reformed at the federal level. (*Testimony of Bishop James Tamayo, Bishop of Laredo, Texas, March 28, 2007*)
- ★ Immigration *can be a resource for development rather than an obstacle to it.* In the modern world, where there are still grave inequalities between rich countries and poor countries, and where advances in communications quickly reduce distances, the immigration of people looking for a better life is on the increase. These people come from less privileged areas of the earth and their arrival in developed countries is often perceived as a threat to the high levels of well-being achieved thanks to decades of economic growth. In most cases, however, immigrants fill a labor need which would otherwise remain unfilled in sectors and territories where the local workforce is insufficient or unwilling to engage in the work in question. (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 297*)

Resources

- ★ **Justice for Immigrants** (USCCB) (www.JusticeForImmigrants.org)
- ★ **Migration and Refugee Services** (USCCB) (www.USCCB.org/mrs/)
- ★ **Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope** (USCCB) (www.usccb.org/mrs/stranger.shtml)
- ★ **Immigration Policy Center** (www.immigrationpolicy.org)

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Failure of Enforcement First Strategy

We believe that enforcement is part of an immigration reform package, but must be complemented with reforms in the legal immigration system. “Enforcement First” has been the de facto U.S. strategy for over twenty years, yielding too many costs and too few results. The costs have indeed run high. Since 1993, Congress has appropriated and the federal government has spent about \$50 billion on border enforcement, multiplying the number of Border Patrol agents by a factor of five (over 20,000 agents), and introducing technology and fencing along the border. Border Patrol in particular has seen a ninefold budget increase since 1992. Border fencing and other physical barriers have cost \$2.6 billion since fiscal year 2005.

Unauthorized migrants continue to enter the country in significant numbers. Over 500,000 unauthorized migrants entered through the southern border annually between 2005-2008. Tragically, since 1998 nearly 5,000 migrants have perished in the desert trying to enter the United States. This trend shown no signs of decreasing -- border deaths in 2009 reached their highest level in three years, despite the efforts of Border Patrol teams that have rescued thousands of desert-crossers. Judging by these measures, Enforcement First has largely failed to end illegal immigration on its own.

This “enforcement first” strategy has failed partly because of its unintended effects. For instance, by tightening border checkpoints, it has spawned a booming human smuggling industry. In fact, these “coyotes” have become very good at evading detection, helping migrants gain a nearly 100% success rate at eventually entering the United States. Border security build-up has also disrupted “circular migration” – preventing some immigrants from returning home to Mexico and Central America after a few years of work in the United States. Instead, these workers bring their families to settle in the United States.

At root, “enforcement first” has failed because it has not addressed the underlying cause of illegal immigration: an outdated immigration system that does not meet the economy’s demand for workers. We are hopeful that comprehensive immigration policy reform which emphasizes legal avenues for migration will mitigate the perceived need for continuing to increase the number of border patrol agents and the amount and length of border fencing. Such reform could alleviate the pressure on border enforcement by undermining human smuggling operations and reducing the flow of undocumented migrants across the border. It also could help create a more stable atmosphere for the implementation of enforcement reforms, such as biometric visas and passports, which will help better identify those who come to harm us.

Addressing the Root Causes of Migration

Without a systematic approach which examines why people migrate, the U.S. and Mexican governments will not be able to address the underlying causes of migration. It is clear that Mexican and other nationalities continue to come to this nation regardless of enforcement strategies pursued by both governments. What attracts them is employment, which either cannot be found in their own communities, or better opportunities because of underemployment in sending nations, in which jobs do not pay enough or are not full time. In an ideal world for which we must all strive, migrants should have the opportunity to remain in their homelands and support themselves and their families. In this regard, we renew our call to both the U.S. and Mexican governments to resume bilateral migration negotiations so that all issues which impact migration to the United States are addressed.

It is important to understand that the manner in which comprehensive immigration reform is implemented is vital to its success. A public-private partnership is necessary so that immigrant communities are aware of the facts of the application process (thus eliminating the involvement of “notarios”) and are able to receive assistance in accessing the program.

(Last updated August 5, 2010, 82nd Legislative Session)

ⁱ Kicanas, Most Reverend Gerald F. *The Ethical Imperative for Reform of Our Immigration System*. Rep. Testimony before the House Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security, and International Law, 14 July 2010. Web. 5 Aug. 2010. <www.justiceforimmigrants.org/documents/kicanastest.pdf>.