



# Stop Border Deaths Now!

A project of the Border Working Group

**Attn: Immigration Policy Aide**

July 15, 2004

Myths abound to justify the presence of undocumented persons from Mexico and Central America within our borders. The reality is that persons migrate illegally to the U.S. because their survival is threatened by unjust economic policies championed as “Free Trade”. Mexican migrants pinpoint economic policies such as NAFTA as the root cause of their spiral downward into a life where they simply cannot provide even the most basic necessities for their families. Overwhelmed by U.S. imports that compete with traditional Mexican crops (which currently receive one third to one quarter of the price that they would have garnered ten years ago), Mexican farmers unable to contend with subsidized U.S. agribusiness are forced to journey northward. When crossing into the U.S., migrants are faced with dangerous and often deadly conditions. ICE and BCIS policies only exacerbate organized smuggling, robbery, and violence, creating an unsafe environment on both sides of the tightened and militarized border.

Ten years of NAFTA provides ample evidence that this free trade agreement has negatively impacted Mexican workers and their families, and it is estimated that more than a million small farmers have been displaced since NAFTA went into effect<sup>1</sup>. With the recent signing of the Central American Free Trade Agreement, and the Free Trade Area of the Americas looming closely on the horizon, it is likely that the devastation wrought on poor communities by NAFTA will be repeated on a much wider scale. Fortunately, the U.S. Congress can still reject CAFTA and begin to formulate trade policies that incorporate truly fair, equitable and sustainable conditions for all nations involved. Particular attention should be given to migration, specifically migrant deaths in the deserts along the U.S. - Mexico border, as a product of greater economic interdependence between the U.S. and Central America.

Policymakers are beginning to think differently about the relationship between migration and current economic models. Fair Trade is one alternative model that has proven to be successful in helping preserve farming and indigenous communities, reducing the phenomenon of migration for economic reasons. By directly paying producers a fair price for their commodities on an international market, fair trade organizations enable indigenous groups to compete in our increasingly globalized world. In the words of Eduardo Verdugo, member of the Just Coffee fair trade co-op in Salvador Urbina, Chiapas, Mexico, “*Salir de nuestra tierra es sufrir,*” *to leave our land is to suffer*. The dignity and personal sovereignty imparted by fair trade could make economic migration as a result of free trade policies a thing of the past.

The Indigenous Communities of the Simojovel de Allende Region of Chiapas (CIRSA) was founded in 1992 to help indigenous Tzotzil and Tzeltal communities reach sustainable development goals while protecting the environment. Since becoming a cooperative partner of the fair trade organization Equal Exchange in 1996, CIRSA members have experienced higher incomes, provided technical assistance in crop improvement and organic agriculture throughout southern Mexico, and receive financial assistance and affordable credit opportunities. Fair trade with cooperative groups of farmers makes self-sufficiency and financial success in their countries of origin possible, thereby eliminating the need to migrate elsewhere.

We urge members of Congress to take an honest look at how economic policies and immigration policies are intimately related. Further, policymakers must take the steps needed to ensure a just and sustainable life for all, the right to remain in one’s home country, and the right to migrate beyond one’s own borders in a safe, humane, and dignified way.

<sup>1</sup> Disney, Kristi. “Globalization: The Migration of Work and the Workers”. Fall, 2001. <http://www.oxfamamerica.org/publications/art917.html>

*From July 1 to July 14, over 37 people died trying to enter the United States. The entire month of June 2004 saw 33 deaths. The majority of July's deaths occurred in Arizona, with Texas placing second for migrant deaths. Below are a few of the victims' stories.*

**July 2:** Wilma Rebieiro Machado, 42, is found dead with a Brazilian passport and Mexican visa about five miles west of Douglas, Arizona. Apparently, Rebieiro Machado is carrying no water, and died of heat exposure.

**July 2:** A Mexican man and a Mexican woman are killed and two suspected smugglers are in custody after a Chevy Suburban crammed with 17 people rolls over into a Yuma-area canal. The vehicle rolls into the canal at about 1:45 p.m. after the driver loses control, apparently trying to elude a Border Patrol helicopter that had been monitoring the Suburban. The migrants include Central American and Mexican nationals.

**July 3:** The unidentified body of a man is found about 1:30 p.m. near Sells, Arizona.

**July 4:** The body of an unidentified man is found in Cochise County, Arizona.

**July 4:** A woman's body is found about 9 p.m. west of Cowlic, Arizona.

**July 6:** Border Patrol agents find the body of Blanca Esthela Ferreyra Vidal, 34, in southern Arizona after her husband uses a cell phone to call for help. She was from Mexico City, Mexico and had been traveling with her husband and several other people. Blanca died of dehydration.

**July 7:** An unidentified woman is found near Little Tucson, Arizona by police after a resident calls to say a man came to her door to report that a female companion had died.

**July 7:** An unidentified woman is found by Border Patrol agents after a helicopter crew reports someone lying on the ground east of Topowa, Arizona.

**July 9:** The body of a man is found on in the desert near Winterhaven, California. The man apparently died of heat exhaustion and dehydration. The discovery comes after the migrant's unidentified cousin flags down a Border Patrol agent around 6 a.m.

**July 9:** The body of a woman is found west of the village of Big Field, Arizona. The cause of death is heat exhaustion.

**July 11:** The body of a 23-year-old man is found in the morning near the village of Vamori, Arizona. The cause of death is heat exposure.

**July 11:** An unidentified body is found on Arivaca Road in southern Arizona.

**July 12:** The body of a 38 year-old Mexican man is found dead near Yuma, Arizona. The cause of death is heat exposure.

**July 13:** A 36 year-old Mexican woman is found dead of heat exposure near Yuma, Arizona.

*At least three people died from July 1 to 14 who were suspected of smuggling migrants.  
The Border Patrol does not include these deaths in their statistics.*