

November 12, 2010

Dear President Obama,

As faith-based and nongovernmental organizations concerned with the human rights of migrants and U.S. policy towards Latin America, we are writing to condemn and express our deep concern following the horrific massacre of 72 migrants in Tamaulipas, Mexico and urge you to take action to prevent the needless exploitation and deaths of migrants in the future.

As you are likely aware, on August 24, 2010, the bodies of 72 migrants from Central and South America were found on a ranch in northern Mexico, just 100 miles south of the U.S. border. A survivor recounted an alarming story: a group of migrants were kidnapped by one of several criminal organizations in Mexico that has extended their activities beyond drug trafficking and into kidnapping and extortion of migrants. When the abducted migrants, 58 men and 14 women, including teens and a pregnant woman, resisted their kidnapers' demands and extortion attempts, they were brutally executed, one of the deadliest mass-killings in Mexico in many years.

While this massacre is appalling in its scale and barbarity, it is far from an isolated incident. In recent years, reports of unchecked violence and brutality against migrants by criminal gangs and corrupt officials have grown. According to a report released last year by Mexico's National Human Rights Commission, an estimated 18,000 migrants are kidnapped in Mexico every year.

However, kidnappings make up only a fraction of the crime and violence affecting migrants passing through Mexico. Migrants suffer a range of abuses including torture, extortion, sexual abuse, and murder, committed by both organized crime, as well as police, soldiers, and other officials. Amnesty International estimates that 60 percent of migrant women traveling through Mexico fall victim to sexual abuse. As groups that work to protect and promote the dignity and inherent rights of all humans, especially the most vulnerable among us, we urge you to take action to stop such egregious and routine abuses against migrants.

To bring an end to this humanitarian crisis, we respectfully call on you to demonstrate leadership needed to:

- **Reform our broken immigration system** to create safe, humane, and efficient channels to reunite separated family members and provide orderly channels of entry for new migrant workers and their families.
- **Implement humane and sensible border security programs** that reflect humanitarian values and strive to promote and protect the safety and human rights of border communities and migrants.
- **Jointly address root causes of migration to reduce the necessity for people to migrate.** Despite the brutal passage through Mexico, many Central and South American migrants choose to make the journey northward to the United States because they see few, if any, alternatives in their home communities that will allow them to support their families. We urge your Administration to work with our neighbors to the south to address economic disparity and political instability in migrants' home countries which are exacerbated by U.S. policies and trade agreements.
- **Ensure that migrants are not victimized by officials in the United States** by working to prevent, and if necessary, prosecute migrant-related abuse, excessive use of force, and corruption by the Border Patrol and other U.S. officials.

- **Focus limited government resources on prosecuting criminals who engage in human trafficking** rather than costly programs like Operation Streamline, which wastes millions of dollars prosecuting non-dangerous migrants for immigration offenses.

Additionally, we encourage you and members of your Administration to elevate the issue of pervasive violence against migrants in Mexico in bilateral dialogue with Mexico, as well as work with Mexican counterparts to:

- **Ensure that authorities on both sides of the border focus on the prevention, investigation, and prosecution of violence and crimes against migrants.** While we have seen steps in the right direction—like President Calderón’s newly unveiled Comprehensive Plan to Prevent and Combat Migrant Kidnapping (*Estrategia Integral para la Prevención y Combate al Secuestro de Migrantes*) and the United States’ involvement in the October 8th ministerial meeting on transnational organized crime and safety of migrants held in Mexico—enhanced political will, resources, and cross-border cooperation will be necessary to ensure robust and meaningful implementation of any new measures intended to strengthen migrant safety and well-being.
- **Protect migrants’ rights defenders.** Father Alejandro Solalinde Guerra, Coordinator of the Catholic Pastoral Care Centre for Migrants in Oaxaca, and countless others who provide humanitarian assistance and protect the rights of migrants have been the repeated target of threats, intimidation, and arrest by both drug gangs and local authorities. We urge authorities to denounce and end the impunity for violence and harassment of these brave defenders.

We respectfully urge you to take action to address the major human rights crisis facing migrants to ensure that the most vulnerable among us receive the basic rights inherently afforded to all humanity.

Respectfully,

AFL-CIO

American Friends Service Committee

Amnesty International USA

Border Network for Human Rights

Center for International Policy

Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach

Conference of Major Superiors of Men

Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA

Jesuit Refugee Service/USA

Kino Border Initiative

Latin America Working Group Education Fund

Literacy Network of Dane County (Wisconsin)

Leadership Conference of Women Religious

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Medical Mission Sisters Alliance for Justice

Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office

Missionary Oblates Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Office / USA

NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

No More Deaths

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Office of Public Witness

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, Stony Point New York

Project Counselling Service

UNITE HERE

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries

Washington Office on Latin America

Witness for Peace

Cc: Hillary Clinton, U.S. Secretary of State

Arturo Valenzuela, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs