



Stop Border Deaths Now!

A project of the Border Working Group

Attn: Immigration Policy Aide

August 16, 2005

A man sits hunched over on the side of the road, unable to lift his head or even his hand to take a sip of water. He has wandered the Arizona desert alone for days searching for help. His eyes, bloodshot and hazy, stare towards the ground. The \$1,500 he paid for a smuggler- gone. He hasn't eaten in three days and his water bottle has been empty for hours. He mumbles of his failure to make it, of his young daughters who will go hungry, and of the dying man he was unable to help. He wants to go home.

For hundreds of volunteers this summer, this is their introduction into the world of migrants at the US-Mexico border. They spend a few days, a week, or a month with No More Deaths, a donor-funded volunteer group that assists migrants in Arizona's Arivaca desert who need food, water and medical attention.

Their mission is simple: to save lives - whether that means calling Border Patrol, evacuating people to hospitals or just giving away a new pair of socks. They are undeterred even by the recent arrests of two volunteers—charged with “transporting illegal aliens” while en route to the hospital with three very sick people. No More Deaths seeks to raise awareness of the border's killing fields in the Arizona desert to the rest of the country.

This summer, many migrants' situations are desperate. Some have been abandoned by larger groups, or have become disoriented and lost their direction only to walk aimlessly for days. Some have feet covered in blisters that are so painful, they are no longer able to walk. Some are aware of the distance required to reach their destination, but others believe that New York is a day's walk and that Los Angeles is but an hour west.

A man named José limps down a trail toward Arivaca fighting the urge to turn around and start the 20-mile hike towards Mexico. The terrain is rugged and rocky and the record heat merciless. The blood from his feet saturates his socks and shoes and each step surely brings excruciating pain from his blisters. A No More Deaths truck spots him and brings him back to the camp for medical attention. Inside his wallet is a picture of his two young daughters, dressed in white, no doubt on the day of their first communion. He tells us that is what kept him going.

Most of the men and women helped by No More Deaths are in similar situations like José's. They have no choice but to risk their lives crossing the desert in search of work to feed their families back home. Some have been warned of the dangers of the desert, and others had family members who died trying. No More Deaths meets the survivors. But once a migrant is helped, they continue their trek, and one can't help but wonder if they will also become statistics.

In Arivaca, the small town south of Tucson where the No More Deaths' camp is located, residents cannot ignore the hundreds of migrants crossing the desert. They leave trash, clothes, water bottles and, increasingly, their own bodies as they pass through. It's an eerie feeling standing where someone hid, scared to death of being discovered – an experience that No More Deaths volunteers face every day. Often, one wonders if they have made it successfully.

A man is lying between two trees after walking for 4 days. He doesn't know where he is and has been abandoned while sleeping by two others he had met on the way. He is from Chiapas, Mexico, and has gone north so he can afford medicine for his sick daughter. He has no food or water, no shirt, and the thinnest shoes possible. His skin is burned from the sun and his lips chapped and swollen. While a volunteer evaluates his condition he stops answering her questions, looks up, and says, “Your father would have crossed for you.”

No More Deaths gives hope – to migrants, and to concerned Americans nationwide. They recognize a problem that didn't exist 10 years ago. It is a direct effect of policies that force migrants to cross the border through desolate and dangerous passages. They have a solution to this tragedy: to support legislation that will allow migrants to enter this country in a humane way, and to continue saving as many as they can until there are No More Deaths.

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In the first two weeks of August, 17 people died trying to enter the United States. The majority of these deaths occurred in Arizona, with Texas placing second for migrant deaths. To date, there have been 358 deaths this fiscal year, which ends September 30. Already, this is the second deadliest year on record, with six weeks remaining. The year 2000 saw 383 deaths. Below are a few of the victims' stories.

August 1: Two men are found dead on the Tohono O'odham Indian Reservation in Arizona by a Border Patrol helicopter at 10:20 am. They men were in there late teens or early 20's and died from dehydration.

August 1: A concerned citizen finds the body of a dead man in Pima County, Arizona and calls Border Patrol.

August 2: A body, so badly decomposed that it is unidentifiable, is found on the Tohono O'odham Indian Reservation by Border Patrol in Arizona.

August 4: An unidentified man is found dead in an orange grove on County 24th and Avenue C by the San Luis Police in Arizona.

August 5: 35-year-old Gabino Munoz is finally found after anonymous calls to the family from other members of his crossing group said they had left him in the desert because he was ill. Munoz had been deported several months earlier, leaving his family behind in Washington state. A diabetic, he had crossed with a group from Tijuana, Mexico and became ill because his insulin was ineffective due to the heat. Members of his group carried him as far as they could, but he lost consciousness. He was found dead near Ogilby Road and a half mile south Interstate 8 in Arizona. His children and other family members are making arrangements to bring him back to Washington for burial.

August 5: A male body is found by El Centro Border Patrol 8 miles west of the Andrade Port of Entry, 3 miles from Ogilby Road in California.

August 7: A male body is discovered 8 miles north of Interstate 8 on Ogilby Road east of Gold Rock Park in California.

August 7: An unknown body is found by a civilian near Gold Rock Ranch near Ogilby Road in Arizona.

August 10: A Border Patrol helicopter spots the remains of an unidentified person in Pima County near Lukeville, Arizona.

August 13: A dead man is found by Border Patrol 2 miles west of Andrade Port of Entry in California on the south side of the All-American Canal.

August 13: Skeletal remains are found by a citizen in the Douglas area in Cochise County, Arizona.

August 15: A body, decomposed beyond recognition, is found in eastern Arizona by a group of immigrants who told of the body when apprehended by Border Patrol.

August 15: A woman traveling in a group of 16 people falls into distress because of dehydration. Her husband and another member of the group found help from a business located in Yuma, Arizona. Border Patrol Emergency Rescue was called and found the woman unconscious. CPR revived her and she was flown to a hospital where she later died.