

June 2, 2010

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

As national faith-based organizations dedicated to serving and advocating on behalf of immigrants, we write today with deep disappointment and frustration over your recent decision to send National Guard troops to the U.S.-Mexico border. This is another step toward an enforcement-only strategy and away from comprehensive immigration reform. We urge the administration, rather than further militarizing the border, to work toward long-term solutions to reform our broken immigration system and to address the root causes of migration.

**The border is more secure than ever before.** Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano has said repeatedly that Border Patrol agents have operational control of the border. The deployment of National Guard troops runs contrary to this message. No amount of troops will ever create a completely “secure” border. Napolitano herself recently remarked in a Congressional hearing that, “One of the questions I think we need to talk about is whether securing the border is ever going to be reached... in the sense of the Congress, or whether that goalpost is just going to keep moving.” This action simply feeds the notion that the border is not yet secure and encourages those who would continue to push the goalposts.

**This is a giveaway, not a compromise.** Just as the Secure Fence Act in 2006 did not make comprehensive immigration reform possible in 2007, this move will likely have no effect to sway the opponents of immigration reform in Congress. But, just as the Secure Fence Act, it will increase border militarization and do severe and unnecessary harm to border communities. As organizations who work with immigrants on a daily basis, we are concerned that, yet again, the “Secure the border first!” voices triumph, while the voices of separated families and suffering communities go unheard.

**Border towns are safe.** Crime statistics in border cities and counties show that crime rates are low and even decreasing. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the violent crime rate in Arizona (as of 2008, the latest statistics available) has been declining since it peaked in 1993. It is now lower than it has been since the early 1970s. The idea of the border as a lawless no-man’s zone is a political construct which is only strengthened by the decision to send military troops.

**Militarization hurts border communities.** Militarization of the border has already had a significant negative impact on border communities: commerce hampered by inefficient border crossings; civil rights violations; impeded river access for farmers and ranchers; impacts on tourism; and harm to public lands. The precedent for military action is not encouraging. In 1997, U.S. Marines sent to secure the border shot and killed a teenage U.S. citizen who was peacefully herding goats. Using the military for civilian law enforcement threatens civil liberties, endangers the safety of families living in border neighborhoods, and does nothing to address the real needs of border communities.

**We must find real solutions.** No amount of fencing and walls – or troops along the border – are going to stop migration as long as the system for reuniting families and processing worker visas is so fundamentally broken, and as long as the economic situation in many countries south of the border is so desperate. Therefore, we ask the administration to take the following steps:

- **Convene a White House Summit to find a way to pass bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform legislation this year**
- **Work with border communities on common-sense, practical, civilian solutions to security issues**
- **Declare federal non-compliance with the Arizona law**
- **Support deferred action for DREAM students**
- **Address the root causes of migration through more just trade and aid policies**

Rather than further militarization of the border, we must work toward long-term solutions to reform our broken immigration system and to address the root causes of migration. A completely “secure” border is a myth; it is unobtainable. As people of faith, our mandate to care for the stranger calls us to seek better solutions.

Sincerely,

American Friends Service Committee  
 Bend-Condega Friendship Project  
 Columbian Center for Advocacy and Outreach  
 Disciples Justice Action Network  
 Ecumenical Committee of English Speaking Church Personnel in Nicaragua (CEPRHI)  
 The Episcopal Church  
 Friends Committee on National Legislation  
 Frontera de Cristo  
 Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA  
 Institute Justice Team, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas  
 Jewish Council on Urban Affairs  
 Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns  
 Medical Mission Sisters' Alliance for Justice  
 Mexican American Catholic College (MACC)  
 Mennonite Central Committee U.S.  
 National Immigrant Solidarity Network  
 NETWORK  
 Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, South Central Community  
 Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations  
 United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

Cc: Secretary Janet Napolitano, Department of Homeland Security  
 Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid  
 Senator Richard Durbin  
 Senator Charles Schumer  
 House Speaker Nancy Pelosi  
 House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer  
 Congressman James Clyburn  
 White House Office on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships