

Statement from the Guatemalan Acupuncture and Medical Aid Project
Friday, July 8, 2004

The arrest on Saturday of two humanitarian aid volunteers who assisted immigrants under life threatening circumstances is not an act of border enforcement. It was an act calculated to deprive US citizens from assisting people who might easily have died from dehydration and heat stroke. The volunteers sought the help of a doctor for medical aid. We uphold the principle of volunteers to provide medical aid to immigrants. Their arrest and detention by the Border Patrol constitutes a violation of immigrants' right to life. We would be remiss if we thought this was a callous act by individual border patrol agents. It is not. It is a demonstration of the utter failure of US border policy.

The United States began militarizing the US southern border in 1984 under President Reagan. Its current containment policy started in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, expanded to the El Paso and San Diego sectors, before President Clinton added hundreds of extra agents in a permanent pincer strategy forcing immigrants to cross either the Chihuahua and Sonoran desert lying south of New Mexico or Arizona, respectively. This calculated policy produces between 200 - 300 immigrant deaths each summer in the bi-state desert zone. As US citizens living in the border zone, we reject this policy and demand the Arizona delegation work for a policy that recognizes the economic pressures that create immigrants. After five years in office, President Bush failed in his leadership on this issue, and it is now time for elected officials to take political responsibility.

A reorientation of policies towards development in Mexico and Central America which employ people in their home countries is long over due. The current policy, which failed to stop the estimated 8-10 million immigrants in the United States already, is an utter failure. The arrest of two humanitarian aid workers is unjustifiable, this is a case of *not only blaming the victims, but of blaming the people who came to the aid of victims*. The real culprits are our public officials who rely on fear mongering instead of legislation to secure our border.

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Background: The Guatemalan Acupuncture and Medical Aid Project was founded in Tucson in 1995, one year before the end of 36 years of civil war in Guatemala. It was initiated in order to provide medical training for Guatemalans who choose to return to their country after living in refugee camps in Mexico and Honduras for thirteen years. Health promoters trained by this organization treat community members for common medical conditions in the Northern state of the Peten, 32% of Guatemala territory.

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