

# Border Fence

“Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to reside there as an alien, for the famine was severe in the land.”

Gen 12:10 (NRSV)

## Information:

The northern and southern borders are the home to millions of people and the port of entry for nearly \$830 billion of goods. Additionally over half of the visitors to the US arrive through the use of land ports of entry. While there is a need to protect the interests of the United States, the measures that have been enacted over the last decade have come at great social and economic costs.

The construction of border fence, designed to keep out pedestrians and vehicles, was predicted to cost \$1.3 million per mile but has averaged a cost of \$3.9 million per mile<sup>1</sup>. Congress has approved 700 miles of fence but with over 1,952 miles of border there are questions as to the effectiveness of this strategy. The Department of Homeland Security is experimenting with computerized surveillance, known as SBI, originally budgeted for \$20 million but costs could reach \$8 billion through 2013<sup>2</sup>.

## Insight:

In reality, the funds spent in the effort to secure the border have not been the solution to the US immigration woes. The flow of migrants has adapted to the enforcement measures by entering via more dangerous routes into the US and as a result deaths have tripled at the border.<sup>3</sup> Since 1998, 3,348 immigrants have died along the US/Mexico border.<sup>4</sup> The increased dangers associated with crossing the border have meant fewer people are risking traveling back and forth across the border to visit their families and many are bringing in their entire families, putting children and women at risk, for the sake of family unity.

Apprehensions at the border had remained fairly consistent with 1.2 million apprehensions in 1992 and again in 2004 despite the heavy burden of lives lost and financial pressures. However, in 2008 and 2009 apprehensions have been significantly lower and could be due in part of a faltering US economy. Many more migrants have reported paying a smuggler in order to increase their chances of crossing the border. These costs have also risen to approximately \$3,000 and put migrants at the mercy of smugglers.

The monetary and human costs of securing the border in the manner we are currently employing in order to prevent undocumented migration into the US far outweigh the benefits of these programs. Until there are accessible options for families to immigrate to the United States either as residents or temporary workers, men and women will continue to risk their lives crossing the border for the sake of their families' future. Only comprehensive immigration reform that takes into account the labor needs of the US as well as the needs of migrants, will curtail these problems.



<sup>1</sup> Government Accountability Office, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d09244r.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Wall Street Journal, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122100338794017091.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Government Accountability Office, <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-06-770>.

<sup>4</sup> Arizona Star, <http://www.azstarnet.com/metro/188935>.

**Invitation to Act:**

Being educated on matters of immigration decreases the chances of being swayed by sound bites issued by politicians and media sources and helps view the issue with appreciation for its complexity. Education is the key to ensuring elected representatives truly speak on behalf of Americans. Be aware of upcoming legislation and contact congressional representatives to urge them to enact humane and effective immigration laws. Educate individuals and congregations on immigration from a Christian perspective and our call to prophetic hospitality.

A variety of organizations and advocacy groups provide materials and resources for congregations wanting to learn more about our nation's borders and their impacts on our neighbors. Presbyterian Border Ministry has six local ministry sites along the 2,000-mile U.S./México border and each welcomes short-term mission delegations for education, awareness, and service projects. For more than 25 years, Presbyterian Border Ministry has been a strong advocate for justice in the border region, as a joint ministry of PC(USA) and our partner denomination, the National Presbyterian Church of México. To learn more visit their website: [www.pcusa.org/border](http://www.pcusa.org/border).

Additionally, BorderLinks coordinates trips to the southern border for education and service projects ([www.borderlinks.org](http://www.borderlinks.org)) and No More Deaths also provides education, resources, and opportunities for mission ([www.nomoredeaths.org](http://www.nomoredeaths.org)).

**Inquire:**

As children of God we are encouraged to boldly petition God. May this prayer help you go before the Creator and ask that God hear the prayers of migrants and give us courage to stand for just and hospitable care of the stranger.

*Holy God your presence transcends all human made borders and your love crosses all boundaries. Help us join you at the borders and help extend some hope in relief from the famine our neighbor is experiencing. Please uplift and protect your people on the move, just as you did for Abraham and Sarah. Amen.*

Office of Immigration Issues  
Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.  
100 Witherspoon Street, Room 4622  
Louisville, KY 40202  
888-728-7228, Ext. 5202  
502-569-8822 Fax  
[www.pcusa.org/immigration](http://www.pcusa.org/immigration)