

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Title:** Border Communities Advocate for a Border of Encounter, Opportunity and Hope

**[Douglas, Arizona, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024]** – The United States' border communities are more than just geographical areas; they are economically vibrant, naturally beautiful, and culturally diverse regions. These communities are places of encounter, opportunity, and hope, home to millions of residents who serve as our nation's primary ambassadors and welcomers. The border region, with its unique blend of cultures and experiences, is best understood by those who live there.

*"Both sets of my grandparents migrated to Douglas seeking refuge during the Mexican revolution. I was born and raised here in Douglas and love my community. We do not see an 'us and them'; but rather a we'. I have lived in a rural area outside of Douglas for years and love the magic of the land and sky that we share with our neighbors in Mexico. I have never felt afraid because of the border. The border is a place where our communities come together. We are divided by a fence, but our economies depend on one another. Our environment depends on us as WE." –Ginny Jordan*

While there are a few who live here who express fear and promote the narrative that the border is a dangerous place, the great majority of border residents do not. It is essential that a broader cross section of these communities is heard and consulted on their priorities and needs when federal policies are made.

*"I have lived in this rural part of our borderlands for over 15 years, and I choose to live here because it is beautiful and safe. I am troubled by the rhetoric of politicians, including those at the federal, state, county, and local levels who seem to want to inspire unwarranted fear among people who live here. I am also concerned about the amount of taxpayer money being spent on spreading these untruths including by the Cochise County Sheriff Office."*

*While local politicians would have you believe that residents here in rural Cochise County should be afraid to walk alone outside, this is a far safer place than anywhere else I've lived. People should take a look at actual crime statistics rather than falling victim to fear mongering." -- Karen Fasimpaur, a Cochise County resident.*

As members of the border community, we assert that migration is neither a threat nor a crime. It is a fundamental aspect of the human experience, driven by the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness.

*"I am the daughter, granddaughter, and great-granddaughter of a cattle-ranching family who settled in Cochise County between Douglas and Bisbee, right along the U.S./Mexico border.*

*I have watched various administrations come and go, often using the complexity of border problems to bolster their own political agendas. And I have seen my community reach out time and again, extending a hand of compassion and friendship to the variety of strangers fleeing situations of violent atrocities and starvation.*

*My faith as a Presbyterian pastor has taught me that when we help the "least of these, my brothers and sisters," we are ministering to Jesus Christ himself. My trust in the goodness of a loving God tells me that we can find solutions when we look beyond our fears, and we open our hearts and our minds to the incredible creativity among us.*

*I know that when we stop demonizing our neighbors, we just might find common solutions to our problems!” --The Rev. Peggy Christianson*

However, for decades, our border communities have been subjected to unnecessary militarization and criminalization. This has not only failed to contribute to our safety but has also led to widespread abuse and corruption among border authorities. The continuation of harmful policies, coupled with the use of the border as a political platform by candidates who engage in racist and hateful rhetoric has only exacerbated the situation.

*“We categorically reject any discourse that perpetuates the militarization and dehumanization of our border communities. The hyper-militarization of the southern border has only led to chaos and loss of life. The systematic violation of human rights, including the deliberate delay of asylum cases at ports of entry, the forced detention of children and families in inhumane conditions, and the deployment of unaccountable border agents, has caused irreparable harm to our vibrant community.*

*Former President Trump comes to our Arizona border to campaign for the presidency after pledging “the largest deportation” in US history. Arizona is a state with an immigrant community of almost one million. We will denounce and stand firm against Trump’s massive deportation plan. Our immigrant communities deserve compassion and empathy. Immigrants are the solution for an economically prosperous country, and they contribute to the cultural richness of this country.” --Alba Jaramillo, Life-long resident of the borderlands and Co-executive director of the Immigration Law and Justice Network*

Facilitating the humane and orderly movement of people across borders is not only a matter of public safety but also a reflection of our commitment to human rights.

It is imperative that we adopt a comprehensive approach to border governance—one that prioritizes human life and human rights, ensures safety for all residents and newcomers, and aligns with global best practices. Our border communities deserve policies that reflect their values and uphold their dignity, not ones that endanger lives and erode trust.

*“We need to focus on building bridges of understanding and cooperation and working together across borders to seek solutions that benefit all of society instead of continuing policies that have caused the suffering of the most vulnerable among us.” -- The Rev. Mark Adams*

We stand united in our demand for reform and our commitment to a border region that is just, humane, and welcoming for all.

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