

June 9, 2008

United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative,

On behalf of the undersigned faith-based organizations, we join together to express our firm support of the **Borderlands Conservation and Security Act of 2007**, H.R. 2593, sponsored by Representative Raul Grijalva (AZ-7). If enacted, this bill would require that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) comply with federal laws established to protect the air, water, wildlife, culture, health and safety as well as the religious freedom and the sacred sites of people in borderland communities. As members of a variety of faith traditions, we are sensitive to the need to protect religious freedom and to respect the ancient traditions of people who have lived on the land along the border for generations. We call on Congress to uphold established federal law and enact this important piece of legislation.

On April 1, 2008, DHS announced that it would impose a blanket waiver of environmental and land management laws along the U.S.-Mexico border. Of the 35 laws to be waived, Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff announced his intention to waive both the American Indian Religious Freedom Act and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. The waivers would affect more than 55 miles on the Tohono O'odham Nation in Arizona and other Indian communities. Proposed border fencing in El Paso could cut off the Tiguas' access to parts of the Rio Grande, which the tribe has used for more than 300 years to conduct sacred ceremonies. As people of faith, we have serious concerns about the infringements on religious freedom and the desecration or blocking off of sacred sites made permissible by the DHS waivers.

We support the Borderland Conservation and Security Act because it would maintain compliance with laws meant to protect the lands, cultures and peoples in borderland communities. If enacted, this act would foster cooperation between the federal government and local communities, facilitating the process of border security and ensuring the well-being of border communities.

As faith communities, we further believe that the federal government must uphold laws that protect religious freedom and sacred sites. We urge all members of Congress to cosponsor and support Borderland Conservation and Security Act.

Respectfully,

American Islamic Congress

American Jewish Committee

Casa de Esperanza

Christian Reformed Church in North American, Office of Social Justice

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society

Hindu American Foundation

Hispanic Coalition for Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Southern Arizona

Jewish Council for Public Affairs

Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference

NETWORK, a National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

Standing For Truth Foundation

Union for Reform Judaism

Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries

United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society