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Death by design: border crossers dying in greater numbers

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The Rev. John Fife, an immigrants' rights activist based in Tucson, Ariz., calls it "death by design." He's referring to the policy by immigration officials of sealing off traditional border crossing areas, leaving immigrants with no choice but to cross from Mexico into the United States in the most dangerous of areas. Fife's long-held observation has proven right once again. People forced to cross the border through mountains, canyons and other lethal areas are dying in ever greater numbers.

A new report from the Tucson-based *Coalicion de Derechos Humanos* indicates a dramatic increase in the number of human remains recovered on the Arizona-Sonora border. Between Oct. 1, 2009, and Jan. 31, 2010, the remains of 61 people have been recovered. This is a dramatic increase over the same period a year ago, when the total of recovered remains was 45. This year's count includes 40 males, four females and 17 individuals of unknown gender.

According to the *Derechos Humanos* press release:

" 'Unknown gender' indicates that not enough of a body was recovered to determine gender, and without DNA, which is costly, it is impossible to know even this basic information about the individual, making identification and return to their families even more difficult. The dramatic increase in these unknown gender cases are a troubling indicator of what the future will look like as people are pushed into more and more isolated areas, making rescue and detection less likely and the likelihood of death more certain."

"Men, women and children continue to perish on our border, communities cry out for justice, and yet nothing has been done to address the policies that have pushed migrants into the deadly Arizona terrain,"

according to Kat Rodriguez, coordinator of Derechos Humanos.

Learn more about the situation, go to the Coalicion de Derechos Humanos Web site, www.derechoshumanosaz.net, and join the chorus of people of faith who are crying out for humane policies and an end to "death by design."

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