



PRESS RELEASE
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**University of Texas Working Group Submits Briefing Papers
to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Alleging
that the Texas/Mexico Border Wall Violates Human Rights**

AUSTIN, Texas (June 13, 2008) - A multi-disciplinary working group of faculty and students at The University of Texas at Austin claimed today that human rights are being violated by the United States through construction of a wall on the Texas/Mexico border. The working group submitted a series of briefing papers to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (the "Commission"), an inter-governmental body of the Organization of American States ("OAS") composed of seven independent experts. The Commission's mandate is to examine and monitor compliance by member States of the OAS, including the United States, with human rights obligations established in international law.

"The planned wall along the Texas/Mexico border has not only engendered widespread opposition while remaining ineffective in fulfilling the United States government's immigration control and anti-terrorism objectives, it also violates international human rights law," said Denise Gilman, one of the members of the working group and a clinical professor at The University of Texas School of Law.

The working group has analyzed and documented a series of human rights violations taking place as a result of plans to construct segments of wall along the Texas/Mexico border. They include:

1. *Violations of the right to property and equal protection guaranteed under international human rights law.* The United States is taking property to build the wall in an arbitrary and unjustified manner without properly considering other alternatives for controlling the border. In addition, the U. S. government has not explained its unequal treatment of property owners on the border. Numerous small landowners will lose property to the wall while more lucrative developed properties are not included in the wall's path. Based on a statistical analysis of demographic factors, Dr. Jeff Wilson, assistant professor in the Department of Chemistry and Environmental Sciences at The University of Texas at Brownsville, concluded that: "The border wall and the necessary taking of property resulting from its construction will disproportionately impact poor Latino immigrant families."

2. *Severe degradation of the environment and violations of the government's human rights obligation to consider harm to the environment when undertaking public projects.* In its construction of the border wall, the U.S. government is bypassing numerous domestic laws designed to protect the environment and the people who utilize and enjoy it. The negative impact of the wall on important and scarce natural resources, including the ocelot, jaguarundi and other wildlife populations, will be severe. The environmental degradation will cause significant harm to the residents of the Texas/Mexico border area who have traditionally held an important connection to the Rio Grande River and wildlife of the border area.

3. *Violations of the rights of indigenous communities protected under international human rights law.* The wall will directly impact the lands of the Lipan Apache, Kickapoo and Tigua (Ysleta del Sur) indigenous communities living along the Texas/Mexico border. Yet, the U.S. government is planning to take portions of these lands to construct the wall without engaging in meaningful consultations with members of the indigenous communities.

Given the gravity of the human rights situation created by the construction of a wall on the Texas/Mexico border, the working group is requesting that the Commission immediately consider the issue during its July 2008 period of sessions and initiate an investigation. The working group has further requested that the Commission hold a general hearing on the Texas/Mexico border wall during its October 2008 period of sessions.

“While it is a shame that we must go before an international body to address the actions of the United States on its own border, I’m pleased that this crucial human rights perspective on the wall will be brought to bear and I am hopeful that the United States will reverse its course of action,” stated Margo Tamez, a member of the Lipan Apache community who has been an outspoken opponent of the wall, which will run through land that has been in her family’s possession for more than two centuries.

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The full text of the briefing papers will be available on June 13, 2008, at:
<http://www.utexas.edu/law/academics/centers/humanrights/publications/>

The Working Group on Human Rights and the Border Wall – The Working Group is a multi-disciplinary collective of faculty and students at The University of Texas at Austin, which has gathered to analyze the human rights impact of the construction of a border wall on the Texas/Mexico border. This project is facilitated through the Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice at The University of Texas School of Law and is supported by The University of Texas Office of Thematic Initiatives and Community Engagement. The Working Group on Human Rights and the Border Wall includes faculty and students from the UT Geography Department, the UT Anthropology Department, the LBJ School of Public Affairs, the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies and the UT Law School’s Immigration Clinic, Environmental Clinic and Rapoport Center. The Working Group is collaborating with affected individual property owners, indigenous communities, environmental groups, Environmental Sciences faculty at the University of Texas at Brownsville and other academics and advocates in carrying out work on this project. In May 2008, a delegation of the Working Group traveled to the Rio Grande Valley area of the Texas/Mexico border to conduct fact finding regarding the impact of the border wall on human rights and to speak with individuals affected by the construction of the wall.