



# Peace & Justice Journal

A publication of Mennonite Central Committee U.S.  
VOLUME LV, NO. 2



*For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.*  
(Ephesians 2:14)

Some of us are old enough to remember television images of people dismantling the Berlin Wall in 1989. There was a feeling of hope, a sentiment about the futility and inhumanity of walls. That sentiment was short lived. Today, at least 70 border walls separate and divide countries and territories across the world.

Those building walls suggest a purpose of human protection but, in my experience visiting border walls, they create more human suffering than they prevent. The U.S.-Mexico border wall funnels migrants to remote desert areas and serves as a *lethal deterrent*. In 2022, the remains of 175 migrants were found in the Sonoran Desert in Arizona—35 more people than died trying to cross the Berlin Wall during the nearly 30 years it stood.

In Ephesians 2:14, Paul presents Jesus as the one who destroys walls of hostility. The invitation in this edition of the *Peace & Justice Journal* is to join Jesus on that mission. In a world that sees barriers and walls as solutions, we can instead, as the Berliners did, dismantle walls and build bridges of peace and justice.  
—Saulo Padilla

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*The U.S.-Mexico border wall from Douglas, Arizona. MCC photo/Galen Fitzkee*

# Reflections on walls



## A Palestinian perspective at the U.S.-Mexico border

During the 10 years I have lived in Palestine, walls have been an everyday aspect of my life. Separation walls, such as the barriers in Occupied Palestine or the U.S.-Mexico border wall, restrict movement, dehumanize, and deprive people of their basic human rights. As a Palestinian, in order to cross the walls, I must go through checkpoints designed to look like a jail where you pass through metal detectors and are treated like a prisoner. Even after going through this embarrassing experience and crossing into Israeli territory, I am still looked at like a threat due to my appearance as a Palestinian.

When visiting the U.S.-Mexico border recently, I became speechless. I saw another wall within a different context, on the other side of the world. On this side of the wall, I was the privileged one, able to freely travel back and forth unlike in my own country, where I do not have the freedom to do so. I understood what some call the “right to mobility” because I tasted this freedom all

*On this side of the wall, I was the privileged one, able to freely travel back and forth.*

Palestinians wish to taste but are not able to because they were born on the other side of a wall.

During this experience, I heard stories from people who wanted to live “The American dream” or who simply wanted to find safety or jobs in the U.S. Some risked everything to cross the border, including their lives.

While I was volunteering at the Migrant Resource Center in Agua Prieta, Mexico, a couple from Guatemala, who had been stranded and walking in the cold desert of Arizona for 15 days came limping into the center to take a breath, a sip of water, and something to eat before going back to try to cross again.

How is it possible to have that much resilience? After hearing these stories, the American dream seemed more like a nightmare to me.

Families often wait for months on the Mexico side of the border to seek asylum in the United States. Yet, U.S. laws and policies prevent them from fulfilling that dream—or even finding personal security. Coming from a family of migrants who left due to reasons of safety, I understand the fear and anxiety of finding a safe place to call home.

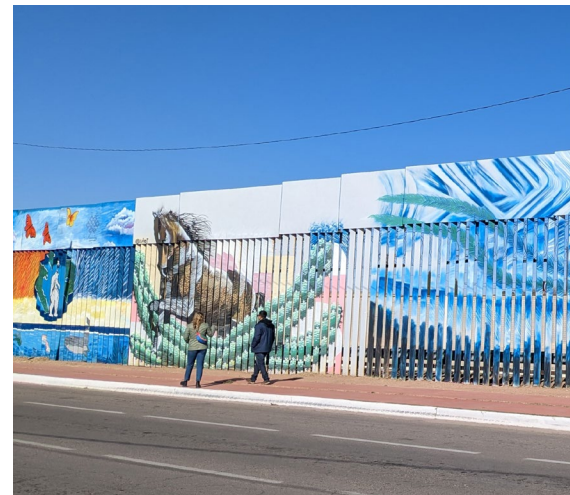
These stories fill me with frustration, especially when I know people are just trying to find a better life. No

person wants to leave the country they love unless there is a good reason. Refugees and asylum seekers are trying to find a place they can call home because their home cannot be that place anymore. Migration is not a luxury; it is a human right. People want a place to escape poverty and danger but often find themselves discriminated against in their new home for being “refugees.”

Observing the similarities and differences between both walls, I experienced another type of resilience. I saw even more clearly that everyone deserves the same rights no matter their ethnicity, gender, religion or birthplace. This is the dream of social and economic equality and security we all long for. No one should be deprived of dignity, safety, or the ability to meet their basic needs. No one should be neglected due to where they were born relative to a wall. —Anthony Khair

*Above left: Border Patrol vehicles patrol a razor wire-filled water channel between a razor wire-covered border wall and a chain link fence in Douglas, Arizona. MCC photo/Saulo Padilla*

*Below: The U.S.-Mexico border wall from Agua Prieta, Mexico. MCC photo/Galen Fitzkee*



# Walls in Palestine and Israel

Contemporary walls and borders are often tied to identity and belonging through the connection to *nation* and *state*—defining who belongs *in the nation* and who does not. The *out* group is deemed as not appropriate to receive ownership of *the nation*.

In 1996 the Israeli government began to build walls around Gaza and refortified them in 2016. In 2002, wall construction began in the West Bank. Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are thus put in the *out* group.

Even though the *Green Line* defines the legal boundaries of the Israeli state, Israeli settlers have built towns in Palestinian areas, creating a different form of wall. In order to protect these settlements (illegal under United Nations Security Council resolutions), the Israeli government constructs more walls. Palestinians experience the walls daily as agents of control and dehumanization.



*The separation wall as seen from inside Aida refugee camp, located between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, in 2017. MCC photo/Emily Loewen*

In Zechariah’s prophecy, we are given a hopeful and humanizing picture of a future without walls: “. . . Jerusalem shall be inhabited like villages without walls, because of the multitude of people . . .” (Zechariah 2:4b). The vision that is given to Zechariah about a Jerusalem to come is one without walls where, “many nations shall join themselves to the Lord (v. 11a).” This vision articulates the humanity and participation of all people in a

flourishing city, and one where access to the city is open and free.

Current U.S. foreign policy toward Israel supports the walling off Palestinian land. U.S. military aid provided to Israel without conditions or accountability continues the separation and oppression of Palestinians. Only when the U.S. government consistently calls its allies to respect the human rights of all people will Zechariah’s vision be realized. —*Zachary Murray*

## U.S.-Mexico border walls

From Douglas, Arizona, the U.S.-Mexico border wall is an imposing monstrosity. Thirty feet tall in some areas, metal columns stretch into the sky flanked by rolls of barbed wire. From the “other side of the wall” in Mexico, the wall takes on a very different aura. Vibrant murals cover rusting slats, making

it beautiful to behold. I’m told this is true of the Palestinian side of the Israeli separation barrier, too. As I gazed upon these images and the stories they represent, feelings of hope, perseverance, and love were evoked within me. Back in the U.S., the prevailing motif was one of violence. As followers of Jesus, which essence are we called to share with the world?

Similar themes of cruelty and violence are also evident in U.S. government immigration policies. For example, Title 42, an obscure public health code, has been used as a pretext to expel migrants without due process for the last three years. Now, the Biden administration is preparing to roll out a new policy that would severely limit the ability of migrants to seek asylum in the U.S. The “asylum ban,” as it is

commonly referred to by advocates, would require migrants to request asylum in the countries they pass through prior to arrival in the U.S.—regardless of whether those countries can realistically provide safe haven. Additionally, those seeking asylum are required to set up screening appointments via the glitch-prone new CBP One app. Restrictions like these violate international agreements signed by the U.S. and erect more unnecessary barriers for migrants in search of safety.

As Christ followers and believers in radical hospitality, the moral implications of policies like these are important to grapple with. It is long past time to imagine an immigration system that lovingly welcomes those on the other side of the wall. —*Galen Fitzkee*



# Worship resources

## Prayer for justice

by Abigail James

Grant us, Lord God, a vision of your world as your love would have it: a world where the weak are protected, and none go hungry or poor; a world where the riches of creation are shared, and everyone can enjoy them; a world where different races and cultures live in harmony and mutual respect; a world where peace is built with justice, and justice is guided by love. Give us the inspiration and courage to build it, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

—From *Catholic Online* at [catholic.org](http://catholic.org)

## Prayer for resilience

by Anthony Khair

Lord, we come to you together, with sorrow in our hearts from the injustices in your world. We pray for the right to a better life; we pray for peace in a secure future; and, we pray to dismantle those walls that physically separate us and the walls inside our hearts. You have given us the power to break barriers and bring justice to this world where justice is lacking. In return, we show you mercy and love as we love our neighbors, and we pray for those who persecute us. On this day we pray to you, as we learn to love you for the gift of grace you have shown us. Give us courage and give us resilience, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Call to worship

Lord, lead the migrant to find a place to call home.  
Lead the refugee to find safety.  
Give heaven to the people who have experienced hell on Earth.  
**Lord, bring peace to this world.**

Lord, bring justice to this unjust world.  
Bring holiness to this unholy land.  
Lord, as migrants walk through the valley of the shadow of death, let them  
fear no evil, for you are with them.  
**Lord, bring peace to this world.**

Lord, let those uprooted from their homes find comfort in your rod and staff.  
Lord, as you anoint their head with oil let security, peace, and justice  
overflow in their lives,  
**as they dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**  
**Amen.**

## Scripture readings.

Psalms 23:1–6, Jeremiah 22:3

## Songs

HWB 403 The church of Christ in every age  
HWB 417 All who love and serve your city

HWB = *Hymnal: A Worship Book*

## IMPORTANT ADDRESSES

Senator \_\_\_\_\_  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510  
(202) 224-3121  
[senate.gov](http://senate.gov)

Representative \_\_\_\_\_  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515  
(202) 224-3121  
[house.gov](http://house.gov)

President Joseph Biden  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20500  
(202) 456-1111  
[whitehouse.gov/contact](http://whitehouse.gov/contact)

## GET INVOLVED!

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The *Peace & Justice Journal* is published three times a year by Mennonite Central Committee U.S. National Peace & Justice Ministries staff. Subscribe or change your address by sending an email to [npjm@mcc.org](mailto:npjm@mcc.org) or by calling (202) 544-6564.

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All biblical quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.



# Facts & figures: Dividing walls

## U.S.-Mexico border wall

**\$20 million**

Average cost per mile (since 2017)

**890**

Number of migrants who died crossing the border in fiscal year 2022, a 58% increase over 2021.

**700**

Miles of border wall (approximate)



**\$1.2 billion USD**

Estimated cost of West Bank separation wall (2020)

## Israeli separation wall in occupied Palestine

**85%**

Portion of the wall inside the West Bank and not on the internationally recognized *Green Line*

Miles of wall already complete

**311**

Total miles when wall is complete

**479**



Top photo: The U.S.-Mexico border wall from Douglas, Arizona. MCC photo/Galen Fitzkee

Above photo: Hebron in West Bank, Palestine. Photo courtesy of Viviane Eye

Data sources: ProPublica, Wall Street Journal, Al-Monitor, Human Rights Watch, Stop The Wall



**Mennonite  
Central  
Committee**

# Policy Principles

## U.S. policy on Palestine and Israel should . . .



*The separation wall as seen from inside Aida refugee camp, located between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, in 2017. MCC photo/Emily Loewen*

### **Uphold a consistent commitment to human rights and international law.**

The U.S. should call for respect of human rights, and an end to the use of violence and violations of international law by all parties in Palestine and Israel. This includes calling for enforcement of the International Court of Justice decision that **the separation wall is illegal and must be dismantled**, as well as an end to discriminatory confiscation and distribution of land and water resources.

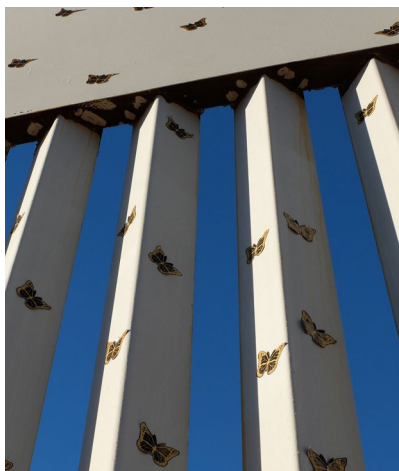
### **Review the use of U.S. military aid to Israel.**

The U.S. should examine the ways in which military assistance to Israel is furthering the illegal military occupation of Palestinian areas. At a minimum, military assistance should be cut off to military units that have committed human rights violations—the same standard that is enforced for U.S. military aid to all other countries.

### **Respect the right of nonviolent protest/right of critique.**

Local, state and federal policymakers are pursuing legislation restricting the right to critique the state of Israel. Individuals and organizations must be free to speak out against human rights abuses.

## U.S. border policies should . . .



*U.S.-Mexico border wall from Agua Prieta, Sonora, Mexico." MCC photo/Laura Pauls-Thomas*

### **Restore and improve access to asylum.**

With Title 42 projected to end in May 2023, U.S. immigration officials are turning to other ways to restrict access to asylum. Asylum bans and limitations run afoul of international and U.S. law and do not meet basic moral or ethical standards. **U.S. policy should increase asylum processing capacity, ensure that families can apply for asylum together, and invest in community-based solutions for asylum case management.**

### **Address the root causes of migration.**

Individuals are willing to risk their lives crossing the desert because the alternative—facing abject poverty or persecution in their home country—is so bleak. Ultimately, the United States must **seek foreign policy solutions and trade agreements that promote economic opportunity and stability in migrants' home countries.**

### **Choose smart and humane border security strategies.**

Current U.S. immigration policies have increased fear in immigrant communities and contribute to the rise in deaths of migrants crossing the border. **Border security strategies should protect community rights, human dignity and the natural environment.** Policies like family detention which seek to deter immigrants have proven ineffective and are extremely harmful to children and families.