



Building Community Across Borders since 1978

Corazón Border Statement

May 2012

There exists considerable confusion as to exactly what the official position of the United States government is concerning travel in Mexico. This confusion has had a very negative affect on volunteer participation in non-profit work in the border cities. One of our sister organizations, *Fundación Esperanza de Mexico*, requested a clarification from the American Consulate in Tijuana, the local consulate most familiar with the actual situation in and around the California-Mexico border area. This letter, included below, from the Honorable Steven Kashkett, Consul General in Tijuana, seeks to explain the nature of the Travel Warning, as well as what it means for those organizations doing humanitarian work in Mexico. While addressed to Esperanza, it was intended to be distributed to the other organizations doing similar work. Esperanza's president, Gilda Vilaplana, was kind enough to forward this to us. We believe it clears up a lot of the common misconceptions about what the official US government policy is concerning travel in Mexico.

We do not want to minimize the fact that Mexico, and especially some of the border cities, have experienced some horrific violence in the past few years. We do want to emphasize that none has been directed at any American doing volunteer work in Tijuana or Tecate. The problems in Mexico are part of the war against drugs initiated in 2006 by President Felipe Calderon. These drug-related incidents are often sensational, providing easy exploitation by the media and a distorted sense of reality. It's also important to note that despite the glaring headlines, the travel statements have not changed significantly since being upgraded to a travel warning in April of 2010.

Meanwhile, the needs of the people in the communities we serve in Mexico, and the opportunity for education, growth, and spiritual fulfillment that US groups (especially teens) can receive by participation in that service, remain. If anything, these needs are intensified by the current economic conditions in the US and Mexico. We are therefore highly motivated to address these issues, implement changes and resolve them where we can in a rational way.

It is painful to explain to our participants how their country is perceived by most Americans. They know that there is none of this violence in their local communities. They know the sacrifices they have made to be part of the Corazón program. They know what a difference your trips to Mexico have made in their lives. They wish they had the opportunity to explain it to you face to face.

So that is what we are trying to do. We take our responsibility to both our participants in Mexico and our volunteers in the US very seriously. We have listened to the advice of both governments and instituted prudent and responsible safeguards for your trip to Mexico with us. We ask you to consider what your service means not only for those in Mexico but also for you and your family as well, and what a tragic loss it would be if the program was allowed to fail.



Building Community Across Borders since 1978



**CONSULATE GENERAL OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**
Tijuana B.C., Mexico

April 10, 2010

Gilda Vilaplana
President, Fundacion Esperanza de Mexico

Dear Gilda:

Thank you for meeting with me to provide a snapshot of the fine humanitarian work that the Fundacion Esperanza performs and the excellent volunteer opportunities that it offers to American young people. I am sorry to hear that the revised Travel Warning issued by the U.S. Department of State last month is prompting the families of some of your prospective volunteers to reconsider their participation. There are clearly misconceptions about this Travel Warning. In light of this, you asked me to furnish a fuller clarification, and I am happy to do so below.

As I explained during our meeting, the U.S. Government has an obligation to inform our citizens about travel safety in foreign countries, but we only issue only one document concerning travel conditions for any single foreign country. That document – whether a “warning”, an “alert”, or a simple notice – must broadly reflect conditions throughout that country. In a country as large as Mexico, this is obviously a difficult task considering that security and travel conditions can vary widely from one region to another.

The changes appearing in the recent Travel Warning were not directed specifically towards Baja California, but instead were largely the result of growing security concerns in other areas of Mexico bordering the United States. As we all know, the violence among organized crime cartels -- and between those cartels and law enforcement agencies – has become quite severe in Chihuahua, Durango, Coahuila, and Nuevo Leon in recent months. Victims have included American citizens, such as the employees of our Consulate General in Ciudad Juarez who were killed at the beginning of last month. The revised Travel Warning was issued primarily in response to events in those areas. For this reason, it “urge[s] U.S. citizens to delay unnecessary travel to parts of Durango, Coahuila and Chihuahua states,” however, **it makes no such recommendation regarding travel to Tijuana or other parts of Baja California.**

The language concerning crime and insecurity in Baja California in this recent Travel Warning is essentially unchanged from all of the previous travel notices over the past two years. We acknowledge those problems, but we also recognize that authorities at the federal, state, and municipal levels have made progress in combating crime and have scored some important successes here.

I hope that you will find this clarification useful and that the Fundacion Esperanza will continue to benefit from the involvement of American volunteers.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven Kashkett", enclosed in a rectangular box.

Steven Kashkett
Consul General