

Border Patrol raids faith-based immigrant aid camp for second time in three months

by [Jack Jenkins](#) in the [November 4, 2020](#) issue



A No More Deaths sign as seen on the road from Arivaca to Tucson in Arizona in 2005. (Photo by Ben Ketaro via Creative Commons license)

Agents with the US Border Patrol raided a faith-based humanitarian aid camp for undocumented immigrants near the US-Mexico border on the evening of October 5—the second action taken against the camp since July.

The raid on Byrd Camp was announced on Twitter by Roy Villareal, chief patrol agent for the Tucson Sector, who referred to the camp derisively as a “so called Samaritan camp.” Villareal said the Border Patrol agents had taken 12 immigrants into custody—along with, briefly, seven volunteers—because the camp was allegedly “harboring illegal aliens with unknown health status.”

The camp is run by No More Deaths, a humanitarian organization founded in 2004 by a partnership of community and faith groups to “stop the deaths of migrants in the desert.” The group is an official ministry of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Tucson.

According to the *Arizona Republic*, the camp was swarmed by more than a dozen vehicles, along with a helicopter from US Customs and Border Protection’s Air and Marine Operations. The same camp was also raided on July 31, when agents reportedly detained more than 30 migrants and seized the phones of volunteers.

Susan Frederick-Gray, national president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, condemned the latest incident, saying the Border Patrol’s “systematic violation of human rights and constitutional rights is criminal.”

“The U.S. Border Patrol has long engaged in systematic human rights abuses, terrorizing migrants in the Arizona borderland,” she said in a statement. “For the second time in less than three months, they descended upon the No More Deaths humanitarian aid station. But offering humanitarian aid is not a crime. Migrating is not a crime.”

She added: “As a religion which affirms the inherent worth and dignity of all people, we cannot and will not rest until the rights, humanity and human dignity of all people are honored and protected.”

No More Deaths tweeted about the Border Patrol action at the camp on October 6, calling it a “military-style raid.”

“We view this as an attack on the lives of the people that we’re trying to support,” said Paige Corich-Kleim, a No More Deaths media volunteer. “This continued escalation is really startling and violent.”

Corich-Kleim noted that No More Deaths is a faith-based group and that the raids constitute “an attack on us as well.”

For now, however, her concern was focused on the plight of immigrants.

“We view that as an escalation of the attack on people who are crossing (the border),” she said.

No More Deaths has successfully challenged the federal government in the past to protect its volunteers, convincing a judge to overturn the convictions of four faith-based volunteers who were put on probation and fined for aiding immigrants at the border.

The activists argued they were simply exercising their “sincerely held religious beliefs” and that prosecuting them violates the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which prohibits the government from placing a “substantial burden” on the right of citizens to freely exercise their religion. —Religion News Service