

# **Two U.S. bishops say Mass near Mexican border to pray for end to violence**

EL PASO, Texas - Bishop Armando X. Ochoa of El Paso and Bishop Ricardo Ramirez of Las Cruces, New Mexico, celebrated Mass July 14 near the foot of a bridge that crosses the Rio Grande to pray for an end to violence on the U.S.-Mexico border.

The Mass followed a procession by more than 300 El Pasoans - led by a group of American Indian dancers - from Sacred Heart Church to Placita de Leones, which is near a highly trafficked bridge that crosses into Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

The procession and Mass were organized by Annunciation House - an El Paso refuge for migrants from Mexico and Latin America - after 14-year-old Sergio Hernandez Huereca was killed in a confrontation between human traffickers and the U.S. Border Patrol near the railroad bridge linking El Paso and Ciudad Juarez.

U.S. officials said Hernandez Huereca was known to be a member of a human trafficking organization, and that a Border Patrol agent had fired on members of the trafficking group when they began pelting him with stones while he was in the process of apprehending undocumented foreign nationals.

Ruben Garcia, director of Annunciation House, said: "The fruit of (U.S.) enforcement-only (immigration) policies is violence, the kind of violence that was seen on June 7th with the shooting death of a teenager on the banks of the Rio Grande, and on May 25th with the death of a 35-year-old man in San Ysidro (Calif.), and in July of 2009 with the shooting death of a Border Patrol agent in Campo, California."

Bishop Ochoa said the Mass was offered as a petition to resolve current immigration problems without recourse to drawing and firing weapons.

The Archdiocese of Mexico City recently issued a statement condemning the shooting of Hernandez Huereca.

Violence on the Mexican side of the border has escalated in the past four years, with 25,000 murders of Mexicans attributed to the battles between Mexican drug cartels spurred by President Felipe Calderon's vow to fight the cartels.

Ciudad Juarez has become known as the world's murder capital during that time, with approximately 2,500 murders attributed annually to cartel warfare.

The day after the procession and Mass was marked by an apparent upgrading of the cartel violence with a car-bomb attack on Mexican federal police that killed three people.

The El Paso and Ciudad Juarez communities are divided only by the narrow Rio Grande and the population of both cities are linked by commercial, cultural and family ties. Each day thousands of people move across four bridges that link the two cities.

El Pasoans have been praying for an end to the violence with prayer vigils sponsored by individual parishes and rosaries held by Catholic youth groups at border settings.

The El Paso Diocese's youth ministry office organized a peace-building workshop, scheduled to begin July 21 with the assistance of Catholic Relief Services, the U.S. bishops' international relief and development agency.

Youths and youth leaders from the dioceses of Ciudad Juarez, El Paso and Las Cruces were to take part in the five-day workshop with CRS personnel instructing them in techniques for fostering peaceful resolutions to violence, said Norma Valdez, director of youth ministry.

She said the initiative "offers cross-border learning opportunities to build leadership skills" and learns about CRS peace-building principles "to advocate for positive social change or transformation within their communities on the U.S.-Mexico border."

Once they complete the workshop, Valdez said, "the Catholic youth leaders will work together as a group to initiate peace-building projects" on the Texas and New Mexico border with Mexico.

In June, bullets from a gun battle in Ciudad Juarez struck El Paso's City Hall, with one piercing the window of assistant city manager Pat Adaauto's office. Adaauto was out of the office at the time.

Mexican officials and the FBI have been investigating the shooting.

El Paso Police Chief Greg Allen said his department's investigation of the shooting was hampered by the fact that the shots came from across the border. He urged those living, working or traveling in the area near the Rio Grande border with Ciudad Juarez to be cautious.

The City Hall shooting raised apprehensions in El Paso that the violence in Mexico could cross the border. The July 15 car bombing in Ciudad Juarez aimed at Mexican federal police killed three people and wounded seven.

A number of U.S. citizens - including a U.S. Consulate employee and her husband, leaving a party in Ciudad Juarez, and a U.S. Air Force medic visiting Ciudad Juarez - have been killed in the violence.