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Dear Team Leader,

In light of the reported increase in violence this past year, in the Tijuana area; I feel it is my responsibility, as the Director of YUGO's Ensenada Outreach Center, to update you (as a Team Leader) on the current state of peace & security, in Mexico.

There is no question that there has been an increase in the TV reports of violence in the Tijuana area. This has caused some teams to question the safety of traveling to Ensenada, since one first needs to pass through Tijuana on the way to Ensenada.

Let me first say that we have not seen any evidence of this in the area or on the road where teams travel through. Tijuana is a large metropolitan area, and the East side of Tijuana is where the majority of the problems have occurred.

Permit me, if you will, to give a brief geography briefing:

The main drug trafficking routes are through the mainland of Mexico. [the state of Sinaloa being one of the biggest] As drugs reach the northern "border region" of Mexico, they fan out along the border in preparation for crossing into the US. [Because of its location, and only having one "north to south" road, the Baja California peninsula is NOT a major drug trafficking route; hence Ensenada is NOT a locale for drug gangs or the Cartel]

Tijuana is more than 20 miles wide (from East to West). The point where your team crosses (San Ysidro border crossing) is 5 miles east of the Pacific Ocean. As you cross in San Ysidro (the busiest land border crossing in the World) you make an almost immediate turn to the West, traveling along the US/Mexico border "fence line". For approx 4 1/2 miles you are within site of the US & the US border patrol. [have you heard of US border patrol being shot at?] Along this area (the five miles west of the border crossing) on the US side of the border, is a US state park, a waste treatment facility & a US military base (Imperial Beach). This is not the area of Tijuana where the Drug Cartel is basing their operation. It doesn't make logistical sense.

As you travel East from the US border crossing begins a 135 mile stretch of desert on the US side of the border (just the border of Baja California), the prime area for the smuggling of drugs into the US.

I make the trip from Ensenada to San Diego usually at least once a week (sometimes more than once), often with my wife & daughter. I have never once had an uneasy experience, let alone witnessed any crime. [I have seen more "road rage" in the US]

I am thankful that the Mexican government (under the leadership of President Felipe Calderon), along with the cooperation of the US government; has dramatically increased its fight against the drug Cartel's (which exist, by the way, because of our appetite for drugs in the US) and their operations. A result of this has been an increase of Federal law enforcement & military presence on many roads in & around Tijuana. Tourism is a major factor of Baja California's economy, and Mexico is being very proactive in protecting tourists.

Finally, it is worth noting that as a city, Tijuana has a crime rate equal to that of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

With all this being said; we, as followers of Jesus, realize that God has a purpose in this world. We respond to His call, in our lives. In our human nature, we are about control & fear. Jesus is about faith & love.

Do you believe God is calling you to Mexico? Can you trust Him? Can you trust that He is calling you and your team for His purpose?

I cannot give to any promises. You may have an accident traveling to Mexico. Maybe pulling out of your Church parking lot. You may fall down & get hurt. Or maybe sick.

All I can say, is that I continue to see God doing Incredible things, as we simply lift up Jesus. He is building His Kingdom. And I marvel that he chooses to invite us to be His partners in His ministry.

As I write this memo, we currently are hosting multiple teams from the US & Canada. The biggest challenge teams have been facing this year is colder than normal temperatures and rain. But with this challenge, they have a renewed perspective on how difficult surviving is for many people in Mexico. One local pastor put it this way, "When the US gets a cold, Mexico gets pneumonia." As your lives are being impacted by a slowing economy, think about how this impacts those at the poorest levels.

This season we have been witnessing a higher level of families at risk levels not seen before in Ensenada. We are seeing children malnourished to dangerous levels. Our staff have been assisting taking some of the most serious cases to local hospitals for urgent medical attention. It breaks our hearts when we realize that in spite of all the work we & others are doing in the area, more & more people are arriving with hope of a better life, only to discover that there is no work, no housing, and little help.

We are here for these Forgotten Families. And we believe that the benefit in loving these Forgotten Families, far surpasses the cost of doing it. Will you join with us, again this year? As we **FORM ONE BODY, BUILD ONE COMMUNITY & TRANSFORM the WORLD.**

We love you, and thank you for partnering with us,

Yours in Christ Jesus,

Scott Wester

Director - EOC