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**Tragic Killing on the U.S.-Mexico Border Calls Into Question Use of Military
For Domestic Policing in P.O.V.'s "The Ballad of Esequiel Hernández,"
Tuesday, July 8 on PBS**

Tommy Lee Jones Narrates the Documentary Investigating the Story of the Teen Who Became
First U.S. Citizen Slain by the Military on U.S. Soil Since 1970

A Co-presentation With Latino Public Broadcasting

*"Audiences who see this engrossing report will wonder why such an important event has been
allowed to drift into obscurity..." — Robert Koehler, Variety*

MEDIA ALERT – FACT SHEET

National Air

Date: **Tuesday, July 8, 2008** at 10 p.m. on PBS. (Check local listings.) The **P.O.V.** series (a cinema term for "point of view"), now in its 21st year on PBS, is broadcast June through October, with primetime specials in the fall and winter.

Summary: In this heated election year, the U.S.-Mexico Border is a magnet for debate as Americans grapple with the complex issues of illegal immigration, national security and the War on Terror. In recent years many have called for a military solution that would include the deployment of armed troops to the border. But as eloquently demonstrated in the new documentary **The Ballad of Esequiel Hernández**, the southern border is not simply a line in the sand, nor is it a war zone. Places like the Rio Grande in Texas are home to hard-working communities and families that straddle both sides of the river, and many Americans there grow up with ties to both countries. As Presidio County Judge Jake Brisbin illustrates: "On a map it's an international border, but in reality it's something you walk across in everyday life."

In 1997, no one in the small town of Redford, Texas (pop. 100) knew that U.S. Marine teams, fully camouflaged and armed with M16 rifles, had been secretly deployed to their section of the border. No one knew that their town had been designated a major drug corridor, and that a team of four Marines had taken up a position near the local river crossing to watch for smugglers. Farmers like the Hernández family, who lived by the river, went on working their fields and tending to their livestock. On the evening of May 20, 18 year-old Esequiel Hernández Jr. left the house to graze his family's goats, taking with him as usual a .22 rifle to keep away wild dogs. It was the last evening of his life and marked the first time a U.S. citizen was killed by the military on U.S. soil since the Kent State shooting in 1970.

Filmmaker's
Statement:

"I was 17 years old in 1997 when a team of Marines shot and killed an innocent American citizen on the Texas-Mexico border," says director Kieran Fitzgerald. "The young man who died that day, 18 year-old Esequiel Hernández Jr., was as much a part of my generation as the students killed by National Guard at Kent State were part of my parents', and yet I have no memory of the news coverage of his death, or discussions about it in class.

"To the world outside West Texas, the story of Esequiel Hernández was a fringe story, easily misconstrued and dismissed by politicians and pundits as an unfortunate accident. When I first heard his story in the fall of 2004, seven years after his death, Esequiel Hernández was drifting into obscurity.

"At the time, my brother Brendan and I were working on the feature film 'The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada,' produced by our father, Michael Fitzgerald ('Wise Blood,' 'Under the Volcano,' 'The Pledge'). One of the principal sources of inspiration for the star and director of the film, Tommy Lee Jones, was the Hernández case. 'The Three Burials' would be a fictional redress of the injustice, but as an aspiring director I wanted to contribute a second film, one that would retrieve the facts of the Hernández case and set them in the context of our current War on Terror.

"The Ballad of Esequiel Hernández attempts to embrace both sides of a distinctly American tragedy. It was my privilege to film with the Hernández family — some of the kindest, most gentle people I've ever encountered — and with three of the Marines involved in the 1997 shooting. It is my hope that in this election year, as the country decides how best to balance protection with peace, their voices and the voices of the Hernández family will be given the careful consideration they deserve."

Bio:

Kieran Fitzgerald, Director

Kieran Fitzgerald directed several short films while an undergraduate at Harvard University. He also worked as a production assistant on "The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada," directed by and starring Tommy Lee Jones, and on "Colour Me Kubrick," with John Malkovich. He directed the documentary short "Being Alan Conway," about the man who impersonated Stanley Kubrick during the 1990s. He is currently a Michener Fellow in fiction and screenwriting at the University of Texas in Austin. **The Ballad of Esequiel Hernández** is his first feature-length documentary film. He and his brother, Brendan (producer) are the sons of producer Michael Fitzgerald ("Wise Blood," "Under the Volcano," "The Pledge").

Statistics:

(Source: www.bestplaces.net/city/Redford_TX-54861076010.aspx)

The 2007 Redford, TX, population was 149.

86.45% of people are white, 0.00% are black, 0.66% are Asian, 0.65% are Native American, and 11.71% claim 'Other'.

88.93% of the people in Redford, Texas, claim Hispanic ethnicity (meaning 11.07% are non-Hispanic).

Related
Information: Border Crossing

(Source: U.S./Mexico: "Stricter Border Controls Make Crossing Perilous," Inter Press Service (IPS) byline: Diego Cevallos dateline: Mexico City, Mexico, Dec 18 2007)

- More than one would be [illegal] immigrant from Mexico a day died (in 2007) while attempting to cross the U.S. border. In the last three years nearly 1,500 people have died crossing the border.
- Construction of walls and fences along the border with Mexico has continued apace, with 120 kilometers of barriers built to date. Some 11 million people who were born in Mexico live in the United States today, around 6 million of whom have no legal documents and live under the threat of deportation. As border controls increase, immigrants are attempting to make the crossing in increasingly remote desert zones where they face heightened risks. Most of those who die while crossing the border succumb to thirst, starvation or exposure. Others drown while crossing the Rio Grande or suffocate in boxcars and trucks.

U.S. Canada Border Patrol

(Source: Border Security, CQ Congressional Testimony, May 22, 2008)

- Additional Border Patrol agents have been deployed from the southwest border to the northern border, with 1,500 expected by September 2009 and more than 2,000 agents by 2010. Prior to September 11, 2001, the northern border was staffed with only 340 Border Patrol agents.
- By late summer of 2008, U.S. Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine will have established the following five air wings on the northern border: Bellingham, Washington; Plattsburgh, New York; Great Falls, Montana; Grand Forks, North Dakota; and Detroit, Michigan.

P.O.V. Web:

The Ballad Of Esequiel Hernández companion website

(www.pbs.org/pov/ballad) offers a full, streaming version of the films for seven days after broadcast, additional clips from the film, an interview with filmmaker **Kieran Fitzgerald** (video, podcast and text); a list of related Web sites, organizations and books; a downloadable discussion guide and classroom activity; and the following special features:

Photo Gallery

In 2006, President George W. Bush announced plans to deploy as many as 6,000 National Guard troops to the U.S.-Mexican border to offer border enforcement assistance. See what that militarization of the border looks like today.

Background

Learn more about the history of the U.S./Mexico border, the use of the military along the border during President Reagan's "War on Drugs" in the 1980s and border enforcement today.

Outreach: P.O.V. is working with public television stations and national and community-based groups across the country to foster community dialogue around the issues presented in **The Ballad Of Esequiel Hernández**. For a list of upcoming screening and discussion events, go to: http://www.amdoc.org/outreach_news.php

P.O.V. also works with nationally recognized media educator Dr. Faith Rogow to develop a facilitation guide with discussion questions and background information to help event organizers carry out discussions around the film's content. Cari Ladd has created the lesson plan. P.O.V. and U.S. librarians have created a multimedia resource list of related fiction and nonfiction books and videos that further explore the issues. The materials are available free of charge at: www.amdoc.org/outreach.

Length: 86:46

Festivals: Best Film, Human Rights Category, Mexico City International Film Festival, 2007
Official Selection, Tribeca Film Festival, 2007

Credits: Director: Kieran Fitzgerald
Executive Producer: Peter Gilbert
Producer: Brendan Fitzgerald
Co-producer: Shane Slattery-Quintanilla
Editors: Kieran Fitzgerald, Brendan Fitzgerald, Shane Slattery-Quintanilla
Cinematographer: Kieran Fitzgerald
Original Music: Bobby Flores
Narrator: Tommy Lee Jones

The Ballad Of Esequiel Hernández is a production of Heyoka Pictures.

Pressroom: Visit P.O.V.'s pressroom, www.pbs.org/pov/pressroom, for press releases, downloadable art, filmmaker biographies, transcripts and special features.

P.O.V.: Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and celebrating its 21st season on PBS in 2008, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running showcase on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through October, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought more than 250 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and has a Webby Award-winning online series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V is available at www.pbs.org/pov.

Major funding for P.O.V. is provided by PBS, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, The Educational Foundation of America, The Fledgling Fund, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, New York State Council on the Arts, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, The September 11th Fund, and public television viewers. Funding for P.O.V.'s *Diverse Voices Project* is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KCET Los Angeles, WGBH Boston and Thirteen/WNET New York.

DVD REQUESTS: Please note that a broadcast version of this film is available upon request, as the film may be edited to comply with new FCC regulations.

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