

## **ECAAR Promotes Land Trust for Vieques**

**Robert J. Schwartz**

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Economists Allied for Arms Reduction (ECAAR) has worked with the Viequenses for more than four years to close the U.S. naval base on the island, but tragically it wasn't until a man was accidentally killed during live target practice that the national media began to focus attention on the plight of the people living seven miles east of Puerto Rico. There is now strong support in the United States for the struggle of the Puerto Ricans to close the base that occupies most of the island on land appropriated 60 years ago in preparation for World War II.

ECAAR's participation has included sponsoring a major study with Professor Lionel McIntyre of Columbia University that resulted in *Vieques Island, Puerto Rico, Looking Forward: A Development Strategy for the Naval Ammunition Facility*, a report praised for its analysis by many experts and officials. Two later studies were done with Professors Leticia Rivera Torres and Antonio Torres, *Vieques, Puerto Rico: Economic Conversion and Sustainable Development* and (Tufts University) *Vieques: Land Trust & Community Extension*, which compliment the Columbia report.

In addition to seeking the closing of the U.S. naval base and rehabilitation with Navy and U.S. funding, ECAAR proposed the creation of a land trust so that the benefits there go to the Viequenses. The trust would be utilized with community attention to sustainable development, development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. A community economic development program should include eco-tourism, agriculture, fishing, mariculture, arts and crafts, education and housing.

Each sector and the government of Vieques should have one representative on the board of the land trust. If a land trust is not formally presented now, the people of Vieques will not be likely to receive the full benefits from the Navy's departure and will be further vulnerable to other exploitative interests such as land speculation. I informed the Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques of this concern in a letter dated October 13 and stated that failure to present promptly a pro forma land trust would require reevaluation of ECAAR's participation regarding land use.

The struggle to recover the land has never been as intense nor as unified as now. All elected Puerto Rican officials are asking the White House to end military testing permanently. At the same time, the request this year by the Department of Defense for additional base closings was rejected by Congress, which is pushing for more military expenditures.

Military bases and plants in the United States have been a pork barrel issue with Senators and Representatives alike, but ECAAR believes that military firms create fewer jobs than do commercial and sustainable development enterprises. Unfortunately, Puerto Rico has no voting representatives in the U.S. Congress, and hence no one to vote for closing the base. Nowhere else in the 50 states are American citizens subject to the treatment we give the Viequenses. The Navy is anxious to resume using the base before the end of the year, and President Clinton is apparently still bargaining for a twoyear period of target practice, although without live ammunition. However, given the facts, he should promptly close the base and demonstrate worldwide that the Navy's claim that Vieques is essential for target practice is simply not true.

ECAAR's raison d'être arises from grossly excessive military and defense expenditures that are unwarranted while vital civilian and human needs of our citizens remain unmet, payment of our dues to the United Nations are not paid, and the potential of our resources to improve world development significantly is dissipated elsewhere.

Over time, these views have been communicated to the White House, the Secretary of Defense, Puerto Rican officials and the press.

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