

## **Commission on Vieques Hears ECAAR Testimony**

### **Lionel McIntyre**

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*On June 9, 1999 Professor Lionel McIntyre of Columbia University and Solnes Urena a former student of the Graduate Program in Urban Planning presented testimony before the Governor's Commission on Vieques, chaired by Secretary of State Norma E. Burgos Andujar.*

Upon arrival on Vieques island on June 4 to testify before the Commission of Inquiry, I could see the effects on the community of the Navy's errant bombing of April 19th that led to a civilian death and wounded four others. The tragedy had galvanized the local citizens who mobilized in protest.

Immediately after stepping off the 5 o'clock ferry on Friday, June 4, we observed members of various civic groups preparing for a 6 o'clock youth march from the Monte Santos neighborhood to the Town Square in Isabella. This followed arrests made the week before by the Navy of citizens who occupied Camp Garcia to protest the bombing. An all day Reggae concert was held on Saturday in solidarity with the people of Vieques to condemn the Navy's activities on the island. A Sunday night ecumenical service held in the Town Square by five or six religious organizations also protested the Navy's presence. Numerous meetings were held with members of the Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques as well as with environmental experts, academics, researchers and students from the main island and with an organization of women and youth that was newly founded in April.

These and other activities, underway as we entered Vieques, represented the level of activity sustained since mid-April. Clearly, mobilization was many fold that of our first visit in January 1996 to start our urban planning study of the municipality and the western portion of the island.

During the Commission hearings on Tuesday, June 8, the Vieques community provided testimony about its experiences of the Navy's occupation of the island and of the impact of its continuing bombing practice. The testimony was supported by experts in archeology, transportation, business, environment, education, and by youth and religious leaders.

The Commission hearing was well attended all day by the public and commission members, and the hearings were broadcast live. The evidence on the accidental bombing acknowledged by the Navy showed that low-grade uranium had been used with the munitions fired on the island. These disclosures heightened the concern of all sectors of the community on Vieques and on the main island.

Our presentation provided evidence from the research findings of the 1996 Urban Planning Vieques Studio that had been sponsored by ECAAR. We explained that the principles of planning and development that were proposed for the western portion of the island were applicable for the eastern Camp Garcia portion also. The key elements of the proposals were to transfer the Navy-held lands, to establish a land trust and extension program, and to transfer economic benefits to local residents. Recent experiences on the island convinced us, as we stated in our concluding remarks to the Commission that "...the more progressive logic of this historic period is to replace armaments of mass destruction with mass education for peace and prosperity."

### **From the Testimony of ECAAR Trustee**

#### **Robert J. Schwartz**

"The people of Vieques, U.S. citizens, have struggled for 50 years to stop the military exploitation of their

home...

I come to make this presentation with my admiration for your people and your beautiful country, which I first encountered as a young economic official of the U.S. Treasury from 1943-44, in World War II. The Puerto Rican people loyally supported the U.S. government in that war. It is far beyond time for the U.S. to repay that loyalty by returning to the Viequesens the island, which is rightfully theirs.

During an interview with Ms. Michelle Faul of the Associated Press, I was asked if I knew of any other base where target practice takes place in a populated area. The question was correctly loaded, for nowhere in the 50 States are American citizens subject to this treatment.”

CHARLES E. SCHUMER

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 10510

May 3, 1999

The Honorable Richard Danzig  
Secretary of the Navy  
The Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20350-1000

Dear Secretary Danzig:

I am writing today to request that the Navy cease the use of live weaponry immediately and permanently on the populated island of Vieques, Puerto Rico. The civilian population of this tiny island has been sandwiched between the Navy's Camp Garcia and the Naval Ammunition Facility for over 50 years. The government of Puerto Rico has lobbied, petitioned and begged the Navy to end their bombing exercises on this tiny island, but they have thus far been unsuccessful.

There is a long history of conflict between the 9,300 people that share this island with a live-ammo Navy training ground. The residents of this island, which is only the size of the District of Columbia, have watched their fishing sites destroyed, their beaches polluted and their economic development stagnate as a result of the constant bombing, shelling and military training on 70% of their island. Furthermore, on April 19, the Navy dropped two 500-pound bombs which missed their targets and killed one Puerto Rican, Mr. David Santos Rodriguez, and injured four others. This recent accident is a prime example of the dangers associated with practicing bombing raids on a populated island.

By continuing the Bombing on Vieques, the Navy has demonstrated a flagrant disregard for the lives of their fellow American citizens. It is time for the Navy to find a new, unpopulated area to practice using their military weapons and ammunitions. The U.S. Navy can not and should not force the people of Puerto Rico to live in fear for their lives by continuing to use their island for target practice.

I know that the Government of Puerto Rico stands ready to collaborate with the Department of Defense to effect a swift transition to a peaceful solution to this long-standing problem.

Sincerely,

Charles E. Schumer  
United States Senate