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Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques
PO Box 1424 Vieques, Puerto Rico 00765
Tel. 787 741-0716 Fax 741-0358 E mail:
bieke@prorescatevieques.org
<http://www.prorescatevieques.org>
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/biekegr/>

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Press Release

Viequense assert their presence in meeting with federales agencies

Yesterday afternoon, around fifty viequenses held a protest in front of the office of the Federal Service of Fish and Wildlife (FWS) in Vieques and later entered the office to participate in a meeting with representatives of the Navy, the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), CH2MHILL - company contracted by the Navy to do preliminary studies on the contamination issues - and community members of the Technical Review Committee (TRC). The Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques (CRDV) organized the activity to force the Navy and other government agencies to allow a more complete community participation in these meetings.

"We are here to support the community members on the TRC and demand genuine participation for our people in these conversations about decontamination. It is our duty to denounce the genocide committed by the Navy; but it's also our responsibility to participate in all the processes related to the clean up of our lands." That was the message of community spokespersons at the meeting that lasted from 5 to 9 PM.

Member of the community told of suffering by their families due to illnesses caused by military toxics. Others spoke of mutations in animales and crustaceans (goats with three eyes, lobsters with four antennae, crabs with three claws...) and many mentioned the total lack of trust the community has toward the Navy and other federal agencies. One woman recommended that TRC meetings from now on be open to the public and asked who would make that decision. A member of the CRDV answered, in support of the proposal, that the community already decided! In addition to CRDV members, other participants included people from the Vieques Women's Alliance, Vieques Veterans for Peace, fishermen and scientific advisors who came at the request of the CRDV to help "decipher" the language and other technical aspects of the process.

Among the demands presented are the hiring independent Puerto Rican scientists - with federal or Puerto Rico government funds - trusted by our people; simultaneous translation; wide distribution of minutes and other documents; hold meetings in more appropriate place.

CRDV members stated that our people finished with the bombing and now we will focus energies and skills learned in that struggle to force the Navy and government agencies to assign all monies necessary to do a profound and total clean up of Vieques.

Last night the federal agencies - Navy, FWS and the EPA - and the Puerto Rican government witnessed an important step in the reactivation and mobilization of our community in defense of our territorial patrimony, the environment and health of our people. They know that from now on there will be a continuous increase in citizen participation, capacity

building and activism related to this life and death topic.