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Lomas del Poleo. Activistas de Las Cruces entregan documentos a Bill Richardson.

Autor:

Activists Corner Governor, Write Letter On Behalf of Lomas del Poleo Residents
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Members of the Lomas del Poleo Alliance present Gov. Bill Richardson with information on worsening conditions at the besieged community of Lomas del Poleo. Photo by Jon Williams

By Rebecca Wiggins.

As New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson was making the rounds in the borderland this past weekend, endorsing local democratic candidates for the upcoming election, activists from the Lomas del Poleo Alliance of Las Cruces took this opportunity to make sure he would not leave the city until he was made aware of the dire situation in the border community.

At first, Richardson did not appear to recall the circumstances in Lomas, though several letters, phone calls and emails have been sent to his office over the past year by activists on both sides of the border, and two graduate students at New Mexico State University personally handed him articles about the conflict when he visited the campus last spring.

On Saturday, Oct. 18, at a fundraiser for Jeff Steinborn, the governor was provided a new packet of information containing documented human rights reports, articles and photos of demolished homes. The group explained how the situation was escalating in Lomas, and that within the past two weeks four homes had been destroyed, two elderly residents were kidnapped and beaten by the Mexican military, and that residents were being denied water and electricity by "guards" employed by the powerful Zaragoza family, which claims ownership of land in the colonia.

After making the rounds and giving a short speech, the governor returned to the group to talk about the situation. He admitted he remembered hearing about the conflict, though in the past six weeks—crunch time for the political campaigns—it had slipped his mind.

"What do you want me to do?" Richardson asked. "I want to do something more than just make a public statement about it."

"You can contact the governor of the state of Chihuahua," alliance member Neil Harvey suggested.

"And you can push to stop all development projects until the human rights of the residents of Lomas are recognized," another chimed in.

April Willeford told the governor that the land dispute surrounding Lomas del Poleo is a direct product of proposed bi-national development projects in the area, including a new port of entry at Sunland Park, in which developers on both sides of the border stand to profit significantly. Harvey further explained to Richardson that the residents of Lomas had wanted to come and speak to him personally about what life is like living in the besieged community, but that they were too afraid to leave their homes out of fear that they would be destroyed while they were away.

The previous evening, the Center for Latin American and Border Studies held a closing reception for a photo exhibit documenting the violence in Lomas. One of the residents attended the event, giving testimony about how community members were worried and constantly living in fear. The resident explained how their children's education was suffering as well. The Zaragozas recently had a deep ditch dug around the



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community, making it difficult for children to walk to school. In addition, the teachers were not showing up regularly, causing many parents to remove their children from the school.

Twenty-five years ago, the school in Lomas del Poleo was registered with the state, and became a federally sponsored school. Approximately 130 children were in the school, grades first through sixth. With the increasing intimidation tactics by guards, and the removal of an electricity generator, this number has dwindled to 65. The resident explained that the state is now threatening to close the school because there are not enough kids attending.

“I will see what I can do,” Gov. Richardson told alliance members as he was rushed off to another fundraiser.

Without waiting for the governor to make the first move, the activists, led by Charlotte Lipson, composed a letter to him as a reminder of this statement, and to suggest a timely future meeting with residents of Lomas and local activists. The alliance also sent a letter to Richardson’s chief of staff, Brian Condit, explaining the meeting and the governor’s response. These letters were mailed on Wednesday, Oct. 22. It remains to be seen if Gov. Richardson will intervene on behalf of the people of Lomas del Poleo. He has participated in multiple negotiations regarding crises in foreign countries, and his official biography claims he is “an advocate for the realization of universal human rights.” Only time will tell if he extends these same rights to the people of Lomas, to help end the campaign of terror against them.

About 35 families remain in the fenced-in area of Lomas. While several families have left out of fear and relocated elsewhere, those living within the barbed wire are still fighting for their rights to their land. They are without access to water or electricity, and they face daily acts of intimidation and violence, now by the Mexican military as well as by the guards hired by the Zaragoza family.

Residents have asked for the following items: water (gallon jugs), flashlights and batteries, kerosene lamps, walkie talkie radios, cell phone chargers, and whistles. Blankets and warm clothing are also welcome.

Donations can be dropped off at the Center for Latin American and Border Studies, located in the Nason House, across from Kinko’s on University Avenue in Las Cruces, NM. In addition, the photo exhibit documenting the conflict in Lomas del Poleo has been extended through December. For more information, contact nharvey@nmsu.edu, awillefo@nmsu.edu, or wiggins@nmsu.edu.

The next meeting of the Lomas del Poleo Alliance is Monday, October 27, at 5 pm at the Nason House.

Anyone is welcome to attend the meeting. Meetings are scheduled for every other Monday at this time.

Interested parties can also participate in an email campaign targeting the governor of Chihuahua. Names and addresses are shown on this site at

<http://www.grass-roots-press.com/2008/10/22/urgent-action-requested-on-lomas-del-poleo/>

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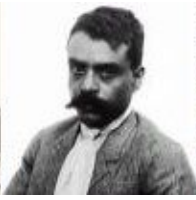
Border Explorer on October 27th, 2008 3:35 pm

Thanks so much for keeping us posted on this situation. Again, I’m linking to this article. I respect Gov. Bill Richardson and hope he will honor this commitment.

29 de Octubre de 2008

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