



COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO
PUERTO RICO FEDERAL AFFAIRS ADMINISTRATION

March 26, 2013

The Honorable Charles Hagel
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1400

Dear Secretary Hagel:

I am writing to urge you to take all the necessary steps to ensure a rapid and thorough environmental cleanup and ordnance removal at the former Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Facility (AFWTF) in Culebra, Puerto Rico. Although live fire training exercises in Culebra ceased in 1975, very little unexploded ordnance (UXO) has been removed by the Department of Defense (DOD) so far, which places the safety of local residents and tourists at risk.

Case in point is an incident that occurred last week when a 7 year old girl, visiting the island municipality of Culebra, was injured after picking up an object that was later discovered to be a UXO that contained white phosphorous. According to the Associated Press, the girl had to be taken to a hospital to seek treatment for severe burns after accidentally dropping and activating the item. A firefighter who arrived at the scene also suffered burns from the same object. I am sure you would agree that this situation is unacceptable and no effort should be spared to protect the lives of *Culebrenses* and the thousands of tourists that visit this beautiful island each year.

The residents of Culebra endured large-scale bombing and other live munitions target exercises carried out by the U.S. military from 1914 to 1975. The Army Corps of Engineers is the responsible party for the cleanup in Culebra and for years have received \$1 million annually to study the cleanup of the site, with little to no actual munitions removal or environmental remediation to show for it. Therefore, given how much time has passed with virtually no significant progress made to address this problem, I respectfully request that you order the Army Corps of Engineers to start clearing UXOs and decontaminating the land and surrounding waters of Culebra as soon as possible.

I also request that you ensure that DOD does not reduce any amount of funding currently dedicated to the environmental cleanup in Vieques in order to fund the decontamination process in Culebra. After 60 years of similarly intense training exercises, and the lingering health crisis leftover as a result, the citizens of Vieques should not have to bear any additional burden for DOD's inaction in neighboring Culebra.

Lastly, I would like to extend a formal invitation to you and senior members of your staff to visit Culebra and meet with the residents of this small island, which is known for its world renowned beaches and other pristine natural resources, so that you can fully appreciate the anxiety felt by

Hon. Charles Hagel

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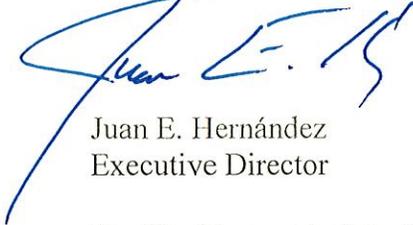
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the countless families who worry about what kind of objects their children will encounter the next time they go out to play, and whether they might be injured as a result.

The Department of Defense has the obligation to address this situation. That is why I urge DOD, and the Army Corps of Engineers in particular, to fulfill its long overdue obligation to remove the countless amounts of UXOs and other contaminants it left in Culebra without further delay.

I appreciate your attention to this important matter and look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Juan E. Hernández". The signature is stylized and fluid, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Juan E. Hernández
Executive Director

Cc: The Honorable John M. McHugh, Secretary, U.S. Department of the Army

The Honorable Ray Mabus, Secretary, U.S. Department of the Navy

Lieutenant General Thomas P. Bostick, Chief of Engineers and Commanding General, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Ms. Cecilia Muñoz, Director, White House Domestic Policy Council

Mr. David Agnew, Director, White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs; Co-Chair, President's Task Force on Puerto Rico's Status

Mr. Tony West, Acting Associate Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice; Co-Chair, President's Task Force on Puerto Rico's Status