

Vieques, 10 Years Later

Escrito por Jorge Viera, Jorge Luis Mota
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It has been almost a decade since the U.S. Navy closed the naval base on the island of Vieques. Mass demonstrations and arrests involving American political figures and Hollywood, forced President George W. Bush to order the output.

A decade later, Vieques seems destined not to forget. We found a people who, beyond its beautiful beaches and picturesque streets, could not be away from his past.

The health of the people is the most important issue in this island, of a population of about 10,000 residents. According to a recent study by the University of Puerto Rico, the incidence of cancer in Vieques is 27 percent higher than in the island of Puerto Rico, and their mortality rate is higher than 34 percent.

Ananinushka Quiñones and his sister, both minors, have spent most of their lives in hospitals. Both suffer from cancer since birth. "My mother has suffered greatly. Just I have 17 years and I thank God that I am doing another year of life," he said.

His mother responsible for the illness of his daughters, to environmental degradation product occurred in Vieques bombing and military exercises the Navy and NATO, conducted for over 60 years. According to this family, such bombings contained all kinds of toxins.

So she is now suing the U.S. government. "We still have not compensated for the wrongs our people. My daughters are the spitting image of the damage done," said Quiñones.

Besides cancer, the incidence of asthma is higher than the average Puerto Rican. Most cases are reported among children.

Resident Commissioner in Washington, Pedro Pierluisi, acknowledged that the U.S.

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government should do more for the residents of Vieques, and said to be giving up the theme. "The goal is to do in Vieques what they have done in other parts of the U.S. where contamination has also occurred," he said.

At the same time a report issued by the federal government indicates that while it is true that there is a higher incidence of cancer on Vieques than in the rest of the country, found no evidence that the disease is caused by military activities.

'Forgotten spaces'

Prohibited Vieques forget, that's the motto of Yabureybo Zeno, community leader who participated in the struggle for the ouster of the Navy. Today, on the walls of his small restaurant hang photos from some of the acts of civil disobedience were slowly changing the history of this small island.

"Peace came because the people demanded it, but it was a peaceful struggle ... It is forbidden to forget. Vieques is a town with a lot of fight. The photos show him, "pointing the walls.

A decade after the Navy's departure from Vieques, almost half of the residents are unemployed. Also, due to the lack of security, the island has become a key point for the smuggling of drugs into the Big Island of Puerto Rico.

Also many of the projects or buildings that were developing thought, were abandoned. Everywhere are empty bunkers belonging to the Navy, silent witnesses of a past that is yet future.

Fishing, which is the core business of the island, has also suffered. The administration of the island of Vieques never came under the jurisdiction of Puerto Rico, but 66 percent of the island came under the control of the Federal Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, according to residents, limits their access to life marina.

Erick Torres is one of those who suffer these limitations firsthand. "I can not grab a huey. I give a \$ 300 fine and a federal court hearing. That in a place where there are about 60 families who live from fishing huey "he said.

In Puerto Rico, the issue back to the table for discussion, and the new president-elect of the House of Representatives, Jaime Perello, has on its agenda the future of Vieques. "There must be a plan between the U.S. government and the local government, in the short, medium and long term, to solve the social and economic problem of this island and its residents," he said.

The U.S. government reports that are already cleaning the grounds of the island, and they do not know exactly the extent of the ecological damage that may have been caused after years of bombing.