

Nashville 2001 Delegate Actions Congregational Follow-Up Resources for

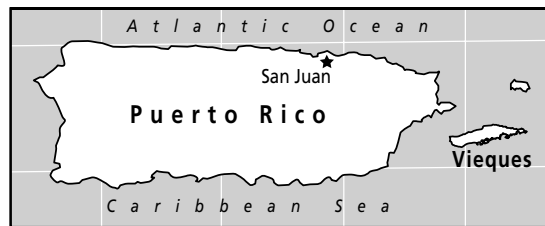
Vieques Resolution

The following resolution was initiated by the interim Council on Faith, Life and Strategy and fashioned by MC and GC peace and justice staff in consultation with Mennonite leaders in Puerto Rico and Christian Peacemaker Teams.

Background

Vieques is a small tropical island (19 x 4 miles) off the east coast of Puerto Rico. During the early 1940s, the U.S. Navy began using it as training ground for the war against Hitler. The military forced more than one-third of the 13,000 people living there to leave the island so their land could be used for a bombing range. Soldiers mistreated the Viequenses, including raping women and fighting with teenagers. When the war ended, the Navy did not leave as anticipated. Since then the military has practiced on Vieques for invasions into Panama and for the Persian Gulf War. The Navy controls more than half of the island. Opposition to the Navy on Vieques has continued since WWII.

In July of 1999, two stray bombs hit an observation post and killed a civilian guard, David Sanes. Since then both residents and international supporters, including members of



Vieques is a 4 by 19 mile island about seven miles east of the main Puerto Rican island. The U.S. Navy expropriated more than two-thirds of the island 60 years ago and relocated civilians to the center section.

September 2001

Sisters and Brothers,

In response to the requests of the Puerto Rico Mennonite Conference, delegates at Nashville 2001 passed a resolution asking the U.S. Navy to immediately leave the island and clean up the environment. Here are resources, including a bulletin insert on page three, to help your congregation take action. I encourage you to take seriously this request. Please support our brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico.

In the name of the Prince of Peace,

J. Ron Byler, Associate Executive Director
Mennonite Church USA

Christian Peacemaker Teams, have nonviolently blockaded the entrances to the base, causing the Navy to cease bombing. However, bombing resumed in May 2000 after protesters were forcibly removed from the bombing range. The current government of Puerto Rico has used many legal and diplomatic means to try to bring an end to the military exercises on Vieques.

Currently the 9,300 residents, who live about ten miles from the bombing range, suffer from both economic and environmental damage after years of bombing. Residents earn a living through farming and fishing. Toxic metals from bomb residue have been found in their fruits and vegetables, and many feel these have caused increased occurrences of cancer. The Navy restricts fishing and their ships destroy lobster traps. Between 100-200 civilians hold jobs with the military, most of them at minimum wage. A local group, the Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques, has planned for appropriate development of the island once the Navy leaves.

Regrettably the June 14 White House announcement that the bombing range will be closed and removed from U.S. Navy control in 2003 does not incorporate an immediate end to its use by the U.S. and other NATO countries. It also does not answer present health concerns or promise to clean up the environment. Because of this, Puerto Ricans have called



Survey of "Reef of Barrels" looking north across the ship wrecked hull sunk in the shallow channel between coral reefs in front of Bahia Salina del Sur, Isla de Vieques, Puerto Rico. (University of Georgia, Photo taken 11/28/1999 by James W. Porter)

for continued nonviolent actions to stop the bombing exercises.

In March of 2001 Puerto Rican Mennonite Church delegates took a bold stand and declared that their silence about the U.S. Navy's bombing of Vieques has supported the oppression of the island's people. On May 11, 2001 they asked MCC to request that congregations write their government representatives asking for a cessation of military exercises on Vieques. This resolution is presented in response to this request from our sisters and brothers in Puerto Rico.

Resolution

We as Mennonite Church USA commit ourselves to

- send a letter of support and encouragement to the Mennonite Church in Puerto Rico and
- send a letter to the U.S. government making our perspective known and expressing our desire to stand with our Puerto Rican brothers and sisters.

As delegates, we commit ourselves to

- pray for Puerto Rican Mennonites that God will show them how to minister to all the people of Vieques, work with the military personnel on the naval bases on the Puerto Rican mainland, and develop peace work with the children and youth of Puerto Rico;
- write notes of encouragement to our sisters and brothers in Puerto Rico;
- support the work of Christian Peacemaker Teams as they witness on Vieques;
- write as individuals and official leaders to our government representatives; and
- acknowledge that we are part of the military complex abusing the people of Vieques because we pay taxes that support the military.

We ask our U.S. government leaders to

- stop military exercises on Vieques;
- clean up contaminated land so children can play safely, farmers can grow healthy crops, and fishermen can fish in unpolluted water;
- remove the Navy from the island; and
- financially and strategically support the reconstruction work of the Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques.

May God grant peace and justice to the people of Vieques, and may God grant us the courage to speak and act when we are called to be God's hands in the world.

Call to Action

1. **PRAY** for Puerto Rican Mennonites, asking God to show them how to
 - minister to all the people of Vieques,
 - work with the military personnel on the naval bases on the Puerto Rican mainland, and
 - develop peace work with the children and youth of Puerto Rico.
2. **WRITE** a letter from your congregation, on official letter-head, to President Bush (*President George W. Bush, The White House, Washington, DC 20500*), asking him and government officials to
 - immediately stop military exercises on Vieques,
 - remove the Navy from the island without delay,
 - financially and strategically support the reconstruction work of the Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques, and
 - clean up contaminated land.

Send copies to your senators, congressperson, Mennonite Church USA Executive Board (*421 S 2nd St Ste 600, Elkhart, IN 46516-3243 <Info@MennoniteUSA.org>*), and your local newspaper. See the PJC web site (Current Events page) to find your congressperson's address.

3. **SEND** a letter of support and encouragement to the Mennonite Church in Puerto Rico. (*Puerto Rico Mennonite Conference, Calle Jose C. Vazquez 106, PO Box 2016, Aibonito PR 00705, convenpr@yahoo.com*).
4. **SUPPORT** the work of Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) as they witness on Vieques. Support their mission through prayer, financial contributions, and by sending someone from your congregation on a short-term CPT delegation to Vieques. This visit will enable your congregation to better know the people of Vieques and the terrible situation they face. The Viequesenses deeply appreciate the support of your physical presence.
5. **ACKNOWLEDGE** that we are part of the military complex abusing the people of Vieques because we pay taxes that support the military. Research how you might pay fewer war taxes.
6. **HELP** inform your community:
 - Organize public debates, talks, and forums that call for the U.S. Navy to get out of Vieques. You may want to invite Viequesenses or CPTers to participate.
 - Call radio talk-shows to publicly express your concern about what is happening in Vieques.
 - Distribute information in your workplace and community.

(continued on back)

Nashville 2001 delegate action: Vieques Resolution

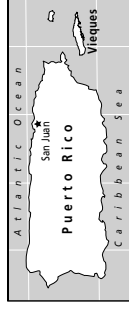
BACKGROUND: Vieques is a 4 by 19 mile island off the east coast of Puerto Rico. During the early 1940s, the U.S. Navy began training there for the war against Hitler. The military forced more than one-third of the 13,000 people living there to leave so the land could be used for a bombing range, restricting inhabitants to the center third of the island. When the war ended, the Navy did not leave as anticipated. Since then the military has practiced on Vieques for invasions into Panama and for the Persian Gulf War. Opposition to the Navy on Vieques has continued since WWII. The current government of Puerto Rico has used many legal and diplomatic means to try to bring an end to the military exercises on Vieques.

The residents, who live about ten miles from the bombing range, suffer from both economic and environmental damage after years of bombing. The military maneuvers greatly hinder farming and fishing—the residents' traditional livelihood. Toxic metals from bomb residue have been found in their fruits and vegetables, and many feel these have caused increased occurrences of cancer.

In March of 2001, Puerto Rican Mennonite Church delegates took a bold stand and declared that their silence about the U.S. Navy's bombing of Vieques has supported the oppression of the island's people. On May 11, 2001 they asked MCC to urge congregations to ask their government representatives to stop military exercises on Vieques. The Nashville 2001 resolution was a response to this request from our sisters and brothers in Puerto Rico.



U.S. Navy Base area



Oración por Vieques/A Prayer for Vieques

¡Oh Dios, Señor nuestro! Cuando hacemos memorias de lo que fue nuestra vida espiritual, emocional, social y ecológica sesenta años atrás, nos sentamos y lloramos.

Oh God, our Lord! When we think of our spiritual, emotional, social, and ecological lives here sixty years ago, we sit down and cry.

Nuestros hijos y nuestras hijas jugaban a la orilla del mar, construyendo sus castillos de arenas con la esperanza de que un día se harían realidad.

Our sons and daughters played at the edge of the ocean building sand castles with the hope that one day they would become real.

Nuestros hombres trabajaban surcando el mar para pescar el alimento de cada día, para el sostén de su familia.

Our men fished the ocean to draw daily nourishment for their family's sustenance.

Nuestras mujeres tejían sus sueños y esperanzas en la tranquilidad y el sosiego de sus hogares.

Our women wove their dreams and hopes in the peace and calm of their homes.

¡Pero, como en sesenta años han cambiado las cosas, ¡Señor! Los enemigos de la paz del mundo han llegado a Vieques, a nuestro mar y a nuestras tierras, y con sus practicas balísticas, con el pretexto de una llamada seguridad nacional, han contaminado nuestro ambiente, han dañado nuestra vida marítima, y se han adueñado de nuestras tierras. ¿Hasta cuando, Señor Dios, tendremos que esperar mas?

But how things have changed in sixty years, Lord! The enemies of world peace have come to Vieques, to our ocean and to our land, with their ballistic exercises. With the excuse of so-called national security, they have contaminated our environment, have destroyed our marine life, and have taken possession of our land. How long, Lord God, will we have to wait?

Ya han pasado dos generaciones, y no se ha visto cambio. ¿Cuántas generaciones mas tendrán que pasar?

Two generations have gone by, and we have not seen any change. How many more generations will pass by?

Los castillos de nuestros hijos e hijas, se desvanecen, a nuestros hombres no les es permitido ejercer su vocación de pescador, en el mar que Tu le regalaste, y los sueños de nuestras mujeres se han ido esfumando.

Our sons' and daughters' sand castles are vanishing, our men have not been permitted to follow their vocations as fishermen in the ocean that you gave us, and the dreams of our women are disappearing.

Y Tu, ¿Hasta cuando permitirás esta aflicción? Tu sabes Señor, su poder, aunque nos juntáramos todos para combatirles, con una sola de sus bombas sofisticadas, sera suficiente para destruirnos.

And God, how long will you permit this affliction? Lord, you know their power; even if all of us would come together to oppose them, just one of their sophisticated bombs would be enough to destroy us.

Oh Dios, pero nosotros esperamos en ti, pero Vieques espera en ti, pero Puerto Rico confía en ti, y aunque con nuestras fuerzas no podamos sacarlos, tu tienes el PODER de dislodgearuitarlos, no solo de Vieques, sino de todo el mundo...

Oh God, we wait on you, and Vieques waits on you, and Puerto Rico trusts in you. Even though we cannot dislodge them through our strength, you have the POWER to remove them, not only from Vieques, but from the whole world...

¡Ojala y no tenga que pasar ni una generación mas, antes de que esto acontezca! Amen.

God grant that not one more generation pass by before this happens. Amen.

—Por: José Enrique Jiménez, Pastor/By: José Enrique Jiménez, Puerto Rican pastor
Shared by Ramón Bermudez, moderator, Puerto Rico Mennonite Conference



This resource prepared by the Peace and Justice Committee for Mennonite Church USA Executive Office. PJC, PO Box 173, Orrville OH 44667; 330-683-6844 <mcpjc@sssnet.com> August 31, 2001

Dear Christian Peacemaker Teams,

Greetings from the Peace and Justice Committee of the Puerto Rican Mennonite Conference.

I am writing to notify you of the decision made by the delegates of the 53rd Annual Puerto Rico Mennonite Assembly regarding the conflict in Vieques PR. The delegates decided that they could no longer keep silent about the injustices and oppression experienced by the Viequesnes. Delegates decided that the Puerto Rico Mennonite Conference will unite with the leaders of Vieques to help stop further military exercises in Vieques, PR.

We are scheduled to meet with the Vieques leaders later this month in order to learn how our congregations can be present during activities planned in Vieques. We acknowledge that we have been slow to react and recognize our silence has supported oppression of our sisters and brothers in Vieques. Our meeting on January 26, 2001 at the Mennonite Summit Hills Church, San Juan PR was a key event for members of our conference. The experiences shared by CPTers helped our members realize the importance of standing up for peace and not letting injustice after injustice continue.

We thank Cliff Kindy and the CPT group for their witness and their commitment to peace in Vieques, PR.

May you continue to find courage and strength to make the vision of peace real.

Peace,

Gilberto Perez, Peace and Justice Coordinator

Resources

- ☑ **Christian Peacemaker Teams** (*CPT, PO Box 6508, Chicago IL 60680-6508; phone/fax 312-455-1199; cpt@igc.apc.org <www.prairienet.org/cpt/>*) has updates on the Vieques situation, information about delegations going to Vieques to support the people of the island, and a speaker's bureau.
- ☑ **PJC web site** <www.MennoLink.org/peace/>
See "Current Events" page for
 - information about advocacy,
 - letter from Mennonite Church USA to President Bush,
 - addresses for your congresspeople,
 - worship resources (see Resources pages), and
 - additional resources and links.
- ☑ **Vieques Libre** is a grass roots organization. Use their web site for news, actions, and visuals. <http://www.viequeslibre.org/>
- ☑ **Pieces of wire** from the fence surrounding the Navy bases on Vieques can be used for visuals for worship and are available from Mark Byler <mbyler@maplenet.net> or contact PJC. The wire symbolizes the exclusion of the people of Vieques from their land, and their being ensnared by a military definition of well-being for their people.
- ☑ **Organizations to help you think about payment of war taxes:**
 - National Campaign for a Peace Tax Fund (NCPTF), 2121 Decatur Place NW, Washington DC 20008; phone 202-483-3751; www.peacetax.com
 - National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee; PO Box 6512, Ithaca NY 14851; phone 800-269-7464; www.nctrcc.org/nwtrcc
 - War Resisters League, 339 Lafayette St, New York, NY 10012; 212-228-0450; www.warresisters.org



This resource prepared by the Peace and Justice Committee for Mennonite Church USA Executive Office.
PJC, PO Box 173, Orrville OH 44667; 330-683-6844
<mcpjc@sssnet.com> August 31, 2001

editor: Susan Mark Landis, minister of peace and justice
graphic designer: Cynthia Friesen