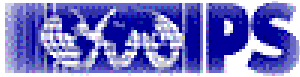


# Appendix VI



## Activists Pressure US to Clean Up Overseas Bases

By Jim Lobe

WASHINGTON, Nov 15 (IPS) - Local communities around the world affected by toxic chemicals, unexploded ordnance - and other health and environmental hazards left behind at US military bases have stepped up demands for Washington to clean up the mess.

At a four-day meeting here last week, activists from the Philippines, Panama, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Japan, South Korea, Britain and Germany accused the United States of failing even to provide host governments with information needed to tackle the problem.

They also charged the Pentagon with using double standards in what meager clean-up operations it did perform.

"It's a moral outrage," said Rep. Barbara Lee, one of the handful of US lawmakers who have taken an interest in the toxic legacy left behind at US overseas bases. "We've done more in cleaning up bases of our NATO allies in the northern hemisphere than what we've done elsewhere. This is a question of environmental justice."

At the Washington "International Grassroots Summit on Military Base Cleanup" foreign activists joined US organizers from communities here which have had to deal with the Pentagon on environmental and health problems.

The US communities have had a far easier time of it because the Pentagon must comply with domestic environmental laws and has a budget of about two billion dollars a year to clean up bases across America.

By contrast, the US environmental regulations do not apply overseas and the Pentagon has no overall budget for cleaning up its foreign bases. What little has been spent on the problem overseas - about 300 million dollars over the past five years - has come out of individual facilities, operations and maintenance accounts.

The problem is staggering, according to Saul Bloom of Arc Ecology, a group works on base clean-up primarily in the United States. "We are leaving behind an enormous legacy of toxic waste on our bases abroad," he said.

During the Cold War, the United States had more than 1,000 military facilities and some 370 major installations overseas, according to the Pentagon. While many of these were small sonar or radar listening posts, some were much larger.

Clark Air Field in the Philippines, Washington's largest overseas base, was by itself roughly the size of Singapore.

Such facilities hosted all kinds of toxic chemicals both for specific military uses, such as chemical weapons, and for simply maintaining military hardware. In tropical bases like those in the Philippines, Panama, and Okinawa, the military also used potent herbicides and pesticides banned in the United States.

In many cases these chemicals have leached into the ground, contaminating air, water and soil in and around the bases, according to numerous studies conducted by the World Health Organization, the US General Accounting office, and independent consultants.

The result is a health and environmental nightmare for surrounding communities, many of which have reported significantly higher rates of cancer, birth defects, and other serious health problems than the general population.

“In Vieques, the cancer rate is 27 percent higher than the rest of Puerto Rico,” said Wanda Colon Cortez, director of the Caribbean Project for Justice and Peace, one of the groups which is leading a popular campaign in the US commonwealth to get Washington to close and clean up the naval base there. Adding to the problem is the fact that, before the 1960s, the military kept few records either here or abroad of the exact amount or location where toxic and explosives were used, stored, or dumped, according to John Lindsay-Poland of the US Fellowship of Reconciliation.

That is a major reason why clean-up efforts in the United States have been so costly, averaging so far about 75 million dollars per major facility. Much of that money had to be spent in assessing precisely what and where were the hazardous materials.

Knowing the potential costs involved in simply assessing the problem has contributed to the Pentagon’s unwillingness to cooperate with local communities eager to find out its dimensions. In some cases, host governments themselves may prefer the Pentagon’s silence, according to Bloom.

Panama and the Philippines which lack the technical and financial means to assess, let alone cleanup the closed US bases, have used them to attract investment for industries - such as assembly plants which employ thousands of workers,

Philippine Sen. Sergio Osmena III, who attended this week’s meeting, called his governments approach “myopic” and warned that the unknown hazards which may lurk beneath the ground may not only endanger the people who work there, but also will leave Manila “open to lawsuits” by foreign investors themselves.

The Pentagon’s lack of data makes it impossible to determine how much it would cost to clean up all of Washington’s foreign bases, according to Bloom, who nonetheless reckons that such an effort could range anywhere from 12-15 billion dollars.

If spread out over ten years, that would add a more fraction to the Pentagon’s annual budget of around 270 billion dollars - less than one major weapons system.

“It might be more cost-effective than gunboat diplomacy,” he said, noting that the failure to clean up the bases was contributing to anti-US sentiment in allied countries.

Congress, which would have to appropriate the money, has yet to take the issue seriously, however. This year, Sen. Paul Wellstone succeeded in getting the Senate to pass a resolution calling on the Pentagon to share with host governments all the information it possessed.

But even that was watered down in negotiations with the House of Representatives to cover only those facilities from which the United States has withdrawn since 1992. “I’m furious at what they did,” he told the activists.

The participants at last week’s meeting want Washington to do much more and they drafted an “Environmental Bill of Rights” for foreign communities and nations which host US bases.

It calls on the United States to, among other things, apply the same environmental standards to its overseas bases as it does here; undertake cleanup operations at active and closed foreign bases that are “at least fully compliant with current environmental restoration programs in the United States; and grant host nation environmental and public health agencies the right to independently inspect bases within 24 hours of their request.