

Southwest Network for Environmental & Economic Justice

1114 7th Street N.W., Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102
(505) 247-8832

David Chatfield, Board Chairman
Greenpeace USA
Fort Mason, Building E
San Francisco, CA 94123

May 24, 1990

Dear Mr. Chatfield:

We are writing you in part to express our gratitude to your organization for the support which you have provided to communities of people of color in the past. Your work has been critical to the struggles of grass-roots organizations fighting against environmental injustice and for working towards a safe environment for all peoples. We would like to express our desire to continue working with your organization in these struggles.

On March 16 of this year a letter was sent to the national leadership of the Group of Ten environmental organizations calling for a dialogue between representatives of those groups and minority leaders in the United States (see attached). Over 100 Third World and other community leaders in the U.S. signed this letter which challenged the Group of Ten for racist and exclusionary hiring practices and for taking political positions detrimental to people of color in the Southwestern United States.

The letter cited examples such as support by Group of Ten organizations to annexation of Acoma Pueblo ancestral lands by the federal government and opposition to sheep grazing rights- of a successful economic development project in Northern New Mexico. The letter criticized organizations within the Group for accepting funds from polluting industries, and pointed out the lack of accountability by these organizations to Third World communities. Debt for nature swaps were also cited as examples of how decisions are made by these groups without input from indigenous communities in other countries. Further, the Group of Ten was called upon to make changes that would allow for greater representation in leadership and decision-making positions for people of color in those corporations.

On April 6 and 7, 1990, the Southwest Organizing Project held the People of Color Regional Activist Dialogue for Environmental Justice (see attached statement of Unity); a gathering of Third World political activists from eight Southwestern states, including Indian nations. The purpose of this activity was to begin analyzing the realities of environmental injustice facing Third World communities in the Southwest and to begin to develop regional strategies to combat these problems.

Important links were made between environmental and economic injustices, and it was made clear that environmental issues fit within a much broader context of social and racial justice concerns. For those who attended, the Dialogue destroyed the myth that people of color have historically not been involved in environmental issues. For many years we have struggled in the workplace and community over what we have viewed to be labor and community questions. These struggles have been over points of environmental health, workplace safety, and protection against pesticide poisoning of farmworkers. They are issues of survival and fundamental human rights. It is the environmental movement in this country

that has for the most part separated itself from these civil and human rights struggles.

It was also very clear to those who attended the Dialogue that the struggle against toxic poisoning of Third World communities in the United States cannot be separated from the same conflicts occurring in Third World communities beyond U.S borders. Transnational plants along the U.S.-Mexico border are clearly exploiting Mexican workers and avoiding environmental regulation in the U.S. We will continue to closely monitor the export of polluting industry to Third World countries.

At the Dialogue, the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice was formed. Our new organization will no doubt require a considerable amount of technical assistance and financial resources, and we are asking your organization to provide the network with resources and training.

Planning also began to develop a training and action institute in the Southwest. Environmental organizations have consistently expressed frustration about what they view to be a lack of people of color qualified to fill leadership positions within the environmental movement. We strongly disagree with this opinion and feel that it is a "cop-out" by environmental organizations who choose not to accept leadership from people of color.

This institute will provide training and resources based on the cultural uniqueness of the Southwest to Third World organizers and activists. It will provide us with the tools to be able to continue to advocate on our own behalf on environmental justice issues, whether they be in rural or urban settings, or on and off reservations and pueblos.

We are aware that representation by Third World peoples within your leadership is also weak. It is our opinion, that your organization must set an example and take responsibility to assure that the environmental movement is multi-racial and that it work side by side with other movements for civil and human rights.

Based on the reality that Third World communities are being poisoned inordinately by agricultural, industrial, municipal and military facilities, we recommend that you act soon in the following ways:

- Examine the racial breakdown of your own organization. We recommend that within a year people of color compose 50% of your staff and Board of Directors. We strongly urge that this take place so that people of color are not mere token members within your leadership. It is important that these representatives be accountable to the interests of Third World communities.
- We urge that your organization actively seek people of color for positions on the staff and board of your organization to fulfill its affirmation of Equal Opportunity and that these leaders have the respect, support, and confidence afforded their colleagues.
- We urge that your organization commit to developing and maintaining a program structure that would assure decision-making by and information sharing with local grassroots organizations composed of people of color regarding program development, employment opportunities, fundraising, technical assistance, etc.
- We urge that your organization advocate in concert with grassroots communities composed of people of color rather than advocate for those concerns which directly address our needs.
- We urge that your organization recognize and develop working relations with organizations composed of people of color and that these communities become involved in the discussion and planning of your proposed organization work.

- We urge that your organization fundraising not compete with the local fundraising necessary to address grassroots concerns in communities composed of people of color.
- We ask that your organization endorse the Community Environmental Bill of Rights (see attached), and work in concert with organizations composed of people of color to promote these rights.

We are well aware of the diversity of perspectives which exists within the environmental movement. We have worked with your organization in the past and we hope that we can continue to work together towards building a movement that is inclusive of all peoples working for social, racial, and environmental justice.

Please respond as soon as possible in regards to these concerns to the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, care of Richard Moore.

Sincerely,

Richard Moore
Coordinating Council
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Manuel Vasquez
Coordinating Council
Phoenix, Arizona

Ernest Witt
Coordinating Council
Northern California

Michael Maes
Coordinating Council
Denver, Colorado

Vicki McCullough
Coordinating Council
Tahlequah, Oklahoma

The Rev. Bill Sanchez
Coordinating Council
Villanueva, New Mexico

Rose Augustine
Coordinating Council
Tucson, Arizona

Cynthia Hamilton
Coordinating Council
Southern California

Odessa Ramirez
Coordinating Council
Carson City, Nevada

Antonio Diaz
Coordinating Council
San Antonio, Texas

This letter was sent to the following:

John O'Connor, Executive Director
National Toxics Campaign
Boston, Massachusetts

Peter Bahouth, Executive Director
Greenpeace, USA
Washington, D.C.

Mary Kelly, Executive Director
Texas Center for Policy Studies
Austin, Texas

Don Hancock, Executive Director
Southwest Research and Information Center
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Doug Meiklejohn, Executive Director
New Mexico Environmental Law Center
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Ruth Caplan, Executive Director
Environmental Action
Washington, D.C.

Maria Painter, Executive Director
Rural Alliance for Military Accountability
Carson City, Nevada

Lois Marie Gibbs, Executive Director
Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste
Arlington, Virginia

Kevin Bean, Environmental Coordinator
New Mexico Public Interest Research Group
Albuquerque, New Mexico