

Open Letter to Mayor Marcelo Ebrard, Head of Government of the Federal District

February 21, 2011

Mayor Marcelo Luis Ebrard Casaubón
Head of Government of the Federal District
Mexico, D.F.

Mayor Ebrard,

We are organizations and individuals from the United States and Canada that support the community of La Malinche in the borough of Magdalena Contreras. We send you this letter because we are concerned about what is happening in the zone and also concerned about the entire project of the Western Superhighway. We support the Broad Front Against the Western Superhighway and in Defense of the Environment, a peaceful, nonpartisan citizens movement, and their demands of:

- 1) The immediate departure of the security forces from La Malinche and the protected natural area of La Loma;
- 2) The immediate suspension of all activity related to the construction of the Superhighway;
- 3) Compliance with all of the terms of the 1/2011 Recommendation issued by the Human Rights Commission of the Federal District on January 20th; and
- 4) Creating the conditions for a real and serious dialogue between the community and you as the Head of the Government.

Who we are

We are organizations that fight for civil rights, social justice, and environmental justice in our communities. We confront global warming with community solutions, such as advancing good public transportation in our communities, putting an end to deforestation of our forests, and removing factories that pollute our communities and earth.

We build community solutions to solve problems caused by corporate greed at the local and global level. We were in Mexico in December 2010 for the United Nations International Conference on Climate Change in Cancun (COP-16), and many of us visited communities in various states of the Mexican Republic before arriving in Cancun. We visited the vibrant community of La Malinche and the encampment of the Broad Front. We met the neighbors, saw the expropriated buildings in the zone, and learned about the situation. We are in solidarity with this community and their demands.

Human rights violations

We are concerned about the violations of the human rights of the community's people, beginning with the aggression suffered due to the surprise incursion into the neighborhood of La Malinche on January 1, 2011. We understand that the Human Rights Commission of the Federal District issued precautionary measures to the Federal District Government in December and put forth that the government avoid exerting aggressive behavior during the December winter holidays and that they inform the community of La Malinche and the Commission in case they decided to enter.

However, without prior warning, government officials with hundreds of *granadero* police officers entered the neighborhood at 6:30 in the morning and put up metal barriers, barbed wire, and a police blockade. They took possession of 51 of the expropriated buildings in the neighborhood and began the demolition of the buildings. All of this is a form of aggression that has impeded the free movement of the residents and has impacted their health, tranquility, and personal integrity.

It has been a violation of their human rights. This is why we support the Broad Front's demands for the immediate departure of the security forces from La Malinche and La Loma and the immediate suspension of all activity related to construction of the Superhighway. We ask the Federal District Government to comply with the 1/2011 Recommendation, issued by the Human Rights Commission of the Federal District on January 20th, in which the suspension of the project named "Western Superhighway" is asked for as long as there is no public consultation and new environmental impact declaration. It is imperative that your government comply with all of the terms of this important commission's recommendation.

We know that the Broad Front has made many different calls for a real dialogue with the Federal District Government but without adequate response from the authorities. This is also a human rights violation of the citizens of the area. People have the right to discuss and participate in important public decisions that impact their families, their communities, their land. They have the right to help build solutions to the problems, especially a problem as serious as this one. Real dialogue is urgent and necessary. We support the demand for a serious, public, and respectful dialogue between the community and your government.

No to the Western Superhighway for environmental reasons

We are part of the diverse voices, including local organizations, urban and environmental specialists, and politicians like former Head of Government of D.F. Andrés Manuel López Obrador, that have recommended halting the Superhighway project due to environmental concerns. We are worried about the Superhighway project because of the environmental damages that this project will bring to communities like Magdalena Contreras and to all of Mexico City.

It is going to cause serious environmental impact with the destruction of thousands of trees and the pollution of air and water, due to the highway construction and due to the automobiles. We know from other cities in the world that these types of highways contribute to air pollution and are unsustainable as solutions for mobility, specifically because they cause traffic with the increase of cars using the infrastructure. Although there may be plans for public transportation on the Superhighway, automobiles are going to dominate, which we have seen in other cities like Los Angeles, California.

The Superhighway is not a long term solution for congestion but instead will privilege the automobile and encourage its greater use in the city. The result will be more air pollution due to the automobile emissions. This pollution is a serious threat to the health of all communities impacted by the Superhighway. It is also a grave threat to the earth because of the impact on global warming. To confront global warming, we have to dramatically reduce automobile emissions, not give privilege to automobiles to continue polluting.

Furthermore, the construction of the Superhighway is going to destroy green areas with forests, ravines, wild species, and water. This green zone is crucial as the lungs of Mexico City because it cleans the air and helps cool the planet with all of the oxygen generated daily by the trees. It is estimated that 36,000 trees will be cut for the construction of the Superhighway. Mexico City, and the entire world, cannot lose nor allow the destruction of these incredibly valuable resources of the earth. We ask that your government protect green areas of Mexico City, for the wellbeing of the city, its inhabitants, and for all of the inhabitants of the world.

The protection of water is also of utmost importance. Superhighway construction and forest destruction can cause serious harm from contamination to the Magdalena River, one of the last living rivers in Mexico City. Furthermore, much of the water that maintains the water tables for the city is in this zone. The Superhighway, particularly with all of its asphalt, will break the ecology and affect one of the few places of recharge of the aquifers. This will impact the entire city in a serious way for generations.

Sustainable, just, and real solutions

In the recent World Mayors Council on Climate Change that happened in Mexico City, you affirmed the importance of cities in the fight against global warming, and mayors from over 100 cities of the world signed the Mexico City Pact to commit to the reduction of greenhouse gases. We ask for your leadership in the world in this critical fight for the earth.

Global warming cannot be combated while expanding urban highways that cause more automobiles on the roads and more emissions in the air. The Superhighway project must be stopped and sustainable alternatives for mobility must be implemented, including real alternatives to the automobile and solutions for public transportation.

Dialogue must happen with communities in order to create just solutions with the aim of building a society that protects the earth and the human rights of the inhabitants, instead of protecting the interests of corporations like OHL and COPRI. Real solutions to climate change come from the communities, not from the corporations.

In our communities we also work for sustainable, just, and real solutions to grave problems like global warming, environmental destruction, and human rights violations. We are against the project of the Superhighway because we see that it has serious consequences in terms of human rights and environmental impacts. We support our brothers and sisters in Mexico City who are working for their community and the earth in this struggle against the oppressive project of the Superhighway.

Specifically, we support the demands of the Broad Front against the Western Superhighway and in Defense of the Environment: the immediate departure of the security forces from La Malinche and La Loma, the immediate suspension of all activity related to the construction of the Superhighway, compliance with all of the terms of the 1/2011 Recommendation issued by the Humans Rights Commission of the Federal District, and a true and serious dialogue between you and the community. We await your response to the community.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Environmental Human Rights
Louisiana, United States

Black Workers for Justice
North Carolina, United States

CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities
New York, United States

Coal River Mountain Watch
West Virginia, United States

Direct Action for Rights and Equality / Acción Directa por los Derechos e Igualdad
Rhode Island, United States

Grassroots Global Justice Alliance / La Alianza Popular para la Justicia Global
California, United States

Grassroots International
Massachusetts, United States

Just Transition Alliance
California, United States

Kentuckians for the Commonwealth
Kentucky, United States

Labor/Community Strategy Center / Centro de Estrategia Laboral/Comunitario
California, United States

Little Village Environmental Justice Organization / La Villita Organización de Justicia Ambiental
Illinois, United States

Mountain Justice
Central Appalachia, United States

Movement Generation
California, United States

National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights / La Red Nacional Pro Derechos Inmigrantes y Refugiados
California, United States

North Gulfport Community Land Trust
Mississippi, United States

Ontario Public Interest Research Group - Ottawa
Ontario, Canada

Oregon Fair Trade Campaign
Oregon, United States

People Organized to Win Employment Rights / Pueblo Organizado para Demandar Derechos de Empleo
California, United States

The Polaris Institute
Ontario, Canada

Portland Central America Solidarity Committee
Oregon, United States

Public Interest Alberta
Alberta, Canada

Rhode Island Jobs with Justice / Trabajos con Justicia de Rhode Island
Rhode Island, United States

Southwest Workers Union / La Union de Trabajador@s del Suroeste
Texas, United States

Student Association of International Development and Globalization of the University of Ottawa
Ontario, Canada

WhyHunger
New York, United States

Denise Perry, Community organizer
Florida, United States

Khanh Pham, VietUnity
California, United States

Ryan Van Lenning, Independent journalist
California, United States

For more information about this letter, please contact Kelly Archbold de Labor/Community Strategy Center (Centro de Estrategia Laboral/Comunitario), kelly@thestrategycenter.org.