

PERSONA NON GRATA

By Norris Hall

An American-based environmental organization, the National Resource Defense Council appears not to want to respect the sovereignty and national integrity of Belize and seems intent on acting in violation of international laws and norms in dealing with the issue of the Chalillo Dam Project. This in tantamount to meddling in this country's domestic affairs, and worse, with disrespect to the laws and due process in this land. This is not the United States of America. The people of Belize should not have to tolerate this type of arrogance from anyone.

When the U.S. Peace Corps serves in any country, they are usually advised that they should not interfere in the country's domestic affairs, nor to meddle in local politics. The same applies, in principle to the diplomatic service. For all intents and purposes, the Peace Corps has been good in adhering to this principle, at least overtly, and when they don't, they are generally booted out, as was the case in Sri Lanka some years ago. This is but one example. And we could understand that, for any foreigner who dares to tread on the sanctity of America's ideals and principles, or for that matter of any other country, would be given a similar treatment, or worse, in some cases.

The National Resource Defense Council should be told, even by a few Belizeans suffering from a crisis of identity, that Belize is not what they may want to consider a banana republic. This country would like to maintain the long and close relations we have had with the United States of America and its people, as long as it is based on mutual respect.

DEFIES U.S. CONGRESS

This organization, the NRDC, has been known to operate outside the intentions of the U.S. Congress, and in certain instances, have acted in violation of the laws of the United States. In fact, accord-

ing to one report, the "NRDC runs its own foreign policy". It has been known to use threats, lies, distortions and bully tactics to bankrupt even small business in the United States. In short, they are perceived as a new form of terrorist, which apparently, the U.S. government has not yet, or do not want to recognize.

A representative of the NRDC, while on an earlier visit to Belize, has been interfering with development issues in this country. He has been rude and disrespectful to senior government officials. He has even used threats. He, and his organization, which have been known for its right wing and racist policies (which by the way is well documented), seem not to want to respect international agreements, conventions, nor the laws of this country.

The NRDC, two other American groups, along with two local NGOs run by expatriates, tried and failed, in early October, in Amman, Jordan, to get a resolution table and adopted at the World Conservation Congress for the condemnation of the Chalillo Dam Project. In fact, the Resolution which was adapted and passed with the support of member states and NGOs, including the countries and NGOs of the Meso-American group, called for respect for the sovereignty of Belize and for due process in accordance with this country's environmental laws.

It was observed that NRDC and the other Americans were trying to ram through their motion to get the WCC to "request the Government of Belize to stop the construction of the Chalillo Dam Project". They failed. There is yet more to come.

THE WCC MOTION

The WCC motion which was passed, called on Belize Electricity Limited to complete the Environmental Impact Assessment, and on the National Environmental Appraisal Committee and the Government

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of Belize to facilitate the due process in accordance with the environmental laws of Belize. This is reasonable and is what has been done all along.

But despite the position taken by the international group of States and NGOs, an official of the NRDC is on record dated November 1, 2000, after the WCC Resolution was passed, stating that "the NRDC, as you know, has taken a clear position in opposition to the (Chalillo) dam".

This means that the NRDC is not prepared to respect to views of other scientists on this issue, nor are they prepared to respect the sovereignty nor the laws of this country. Worse the NRDC, by calling a meeting here in next week is instigating mischief and is acting in violation of the WCC Resolution.

This organization should be stopped in their tracks for its arrogance and disrespect. Disrespect even the Charter of United Nations and for the principles of international law. The NRDC, Conservation International (CI), and Defenders of Wildlife, have no jurisdiction over the sovereignty of Belize and had no right to even draft the resolution they did, for a motion affecting the country of Belize, which is an independent state. Tolerance, by any standard, is not an inexhaustible commodity, not even in a democracy.

If these groups cannot even accept the collective position of the International Conservation Union that was taken at the WCC, then perhaps they ought to be expelled from IUCN.

UN PRINCIPLES AND THE HEIDELBERG APPEAL

The United Nations Conference on

the Human Environment, under Principle 21, proclaims that "States have, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and principles of international law, the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental policies, and the responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other states or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction." Of course that could take us into another discussion on global warming.

Coming out of the Rio Summit which was held in Brazil in 1992, was an appeal by a group of hundreds of scientists and intellectuals. The Heidelberg Appeal, as it is called, addressed Heads of States and Governments. The group stated that "We want to make our full contribution to the preservation of our common heritage, the Earth," but continued by stating that "We are however worried, at the dawn of the 21st century, at the emergence of an irrational ideology which is opposed to scientific and industrial progress and impedes economic and social development."

The Appeal draws "everybody's attention to the absolute necessity of helping poor countries attain a level of sustainable development which matches the rest of the planet, protecting them from troubles and dangers stemming from developed nations and avoiding their entanglement in a web of unrealistic obligations which would compromise both their independence and their dignity."

The Heidelberg Appeal notes that the greatest evils which stalk the Earth are ignorance, oppression and poverty and that science, technology and Industry should be used as indispensable for the future shape of humanity and to alleviate these evils.

As one of my colleagues said to me this week: "It seems now that expatriates are meeting to decide on the future of Belizeans." Haven't we been down that road before for too many years?

The NRDC should therefore now be recognized as a terrorist threat to this state of Belize. Within the framework of UN Principles and the laws of Belize such groups and individuals should be declared persona non grata.