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Foreign Minister Asks U.S. to Relocate Proposed Nuclear-Waste Dump

by LADB Staff

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The Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores (SRE) has requested formal consultations with the US government to protest a proposed nuclear-storage site 22 km from the US- Mexico border in Sierra Blanca, in southwestern Texas. In a letter to the US government, Foreign Relations Secretary Rosario Green Macias urged US President Bill Clinton's administration to "heed the legitimate opposition" to the project and relocate the nuclear-waste site, the official news agency Notimex said. The SRE request for consultations followed months of pressure from environmental groups and the Mexican legislature, which accused President Ernesto Zedillo's administration of responding timidly to the proposed facility.

The Sierra Blanca site was first proposed in 1992, but met only token objections from the SRE and Mexico's Procuraduria Federal de Proteccion al Medio Ambiente (PROFEPA). Deputy Alejandro Jimenez Taboada, chair of the Comision de Ecologia y Medio Ambiente in the Chamber of Deputies, had led a campaign urging the SRE to take a stronger position on the project beyond mere diplomatic protests.

Jimenez is a member of the Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano (PVEM). "It is important for Mexicans that our government energetically protest the Sierra Blanca project, which could harm Mexican citizens as well as the environment along our northern border," said an environmental-committee letter to Foreign Relations Secretary Rosario Green Macias.

Legislative panel says site violates NAFTA , 1983 treaty

The committee urged Green to invoke environmental provisions of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and a 1983 US-Mexico environmental treaty, which obligates both countries to cooperate on environmental protection along the US-Mexico border. The storage site, currently under review by the Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission, has met strong local opposition. In the US, seven counties and 11 local governments have passed resolutions opposing the site. In Mexico, the Coahuila and Chihuahua state legislatures and the cities of Ciudad Acuna and Ciudad Juarez have also presented documents opposing the project.

The resolutions are part of a campaign by a US-Mexico coalition of environmentalists, federal and local legislators, and human rights activists to stop the project. The campaign began in October 1997 (see SourceMex, 11/05/97). The final decision on the Sierra Blanca site may rest with the US Senate. Before the end of January, it must accept or reject a compact signed by the states of Texas, Vermont, and Maine to deposit low-level nuclear waste at Sierra Blanca. (Sources: Novedades, 01/22/98, 01/23/98; Excelsior, 01/23/98; Notimex, 01/23/98, 01/26/98)

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