

Testimony of Mrs. Rosa Noemi Amaro Toykin, President of the Movement for the Health in La Oroya (MOSAO), to House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health and Human Rights

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My name is Rosa Amaro. I am the President of the Movement for Health in La Oroya (MOSAO) in La Oroya, Peru. MOSAO is a group made up of residents of La Oroya who are concerned about the health of the women, children, and elderly of the town.

I would like to thank Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Bass, for the opportunity to testify today. I am not here as a political leader or a technical expert. I come here as a citizen of La Oroya and as a concerned mother of two beautiful boys, Moises and Jesus. I founded MOSAO to help find a solution for the citizens of La Oroya so that we can live in a healthy environment, free of smoke and toxic gasses.

I started to be concerned about my children's health in 2000, when the Peruvian Ministry of Heath tested my children for lead poisoning. The results were frightening. My five year old son had 58.3 micrograms of lead for every deciliter of blood.

As you may know, lead attacks the brain and central nervous system. Children who survive lead poisoning typically suffer from a range of ill effects such as dyslexia and attention deficit disorder to mental retardation. These effects are permanent.

The toxic emissions poisoning the children of La Oroya come from the lead smelter, operated by Doe Run, an American company, that purchased the smelter in 1997. As part of the purchase agreement, Doe Run committed to comply with an Environmental Remediation Program, called a PAMA. One of the requirements of the PAMA was to build a sulfuric acid plant that would decrease the pollution.

However, still today Doe Run's copper-circuit sulfuric acid plant has only been 57 percent completed. As a result, while the Doe Run Peru smelter was functioning, it continued to pollute and to emit gasses loaded with sulfur dioxide that poisoned the children. The Peruvian government extended the deadline to complete the treatment plant to 2009. However, the company still had not finished building the sulfuric acid plant by then. Instead it declared bankruptcy in 2009 and sued the Peruvian government for US\$800 million, using a provision in the U.S./Peru Free Trade Agreement.

As a resident and a person who has seen the practices of Doe Run since the beginning, I believe Doe Run is a bad example of foreign investment in Peru. The government already gave Doe Run several PAMA extensions so it could modernize the complex, but the company never complied and now it has the nerve to sue the state.

In addition to suing the state, Doe Run has caused many conflicts in La Oroya within families and among neighbors. Some workers support Doe Run and the company uses them to make demands of the Peruvian government. The company has its own radio stations which it uses to slander people like myself and others like Monsignor Barreto who are only trying to help people live in a place that is not contaminated.

Supporters of Doe Run have thrown stones at me, threatened to burn down my house, and threatened my life. The attacks come through written bulletins and attacks on the radio waves. When they see us in the street they shout “Death to MOSAO.” We have no protection from these threats. As a precaution, I hide inside my house and I don’t go out into the streets for fear of being attacked by the workers and their family members.

When we have gone to the governing body of La Oroya to ask for guarantees, the secretary there tells us that we should bring in the names and addresses of the people who have attacked us verbally on the radio stations, and the time the attack occurred. But it is impossible for us to get this information, because we can’t identify these people, and we don’t know where to go or who can defend us from these death threats.

I am here today to defend the land where I was born for the sake of my children and my children’s children. They are also going to want to work someday and they are going to ask us what we did to defend the land and clean air. I will tell them with pride that we demanded: the right to life, to health, and the right to protect our vulnerable children and pregnant mothers from contamination.

Today, my son’s blood lead level has gone down to 24. That’s because for more than two and a half years, there have been no lead emissions in La Oroya because Doe Run has not been operating. Today in La Oroya we have clean air, as confirmed by Air Quality Standard Compliance Reports – the Peruvian version of the EPA. In 2007 the particle pollution levels were 66.53 micrograms per deciliter. Today the levels have decreased considerably to 19.91 – that’s a 70% reduction in toxic pollution. Likewise, the levels of sulfur-dioxide in the air have decreased from 1,177.33 micrograms to just 2.63 micrograms. This data was published by Doe Run Peru itself, since 2007, the company has been required by the Peruvian State to measure its compliance with its environmental commitments and it has implemented an air quality monitoring system.

As a resident of La Oroya, I would like for Doe Run or any group operating the lead smelter to guarantee that air quality will not be harmed, and I would like to continue breathing the kind of air we have today, without pollution or gasses. I would ask you please press upon the Peruvian government to continue to monitor and scrutinize the environmental impact of the activities of the Metallurgical Mining Complex in La Oroya, and ensure the protection of our health and our ability to live with clean and healthy air. Please bring to your influence to bear in requiring Doe Run behave better and comply with the same safety standards that are imposed upon them here in the U.S. - so that our children may live healthy lives like American children.