

Power Within Inc.

462 Wellington St. W., Suite 201

Toronto, Ontario M5V 1E3

T. 416.591.4000

F. 416.591.4020

February 22, 2007

Dear Sirs,

We are writing in connection with the visit to Vancouver by Vicente Fox, former president of Mexico, and his wife, Martha Sahagun, as part of your Power Within Event on March 8, 2007.

We strongly urge you to cancel their participation.

There are several matters of grave concern that prompt us to make this request. The web site for the event says Mr. Fox and Ms. Sahagun will speak on the subject of leadership. We believe that both proposed speakers are unqualified to speak on this topic.

Also as you might be aware, March 8 is International Women's Day. We consider it a deep insult to women to have Mr. Fox and Ms. Sahagun held up as examples of successful democratic leaders, especially on this day. On March 8, the world remembers and celebrates the struggles for women's rights and gender equality, and against violence directed at women. Mr. Fox's atrocious record on women's rights is outlined below.

Contrary to the statements on the event web site, we believe the legacy of the Fox presidency is nothing to be proud of. It is one of serious human rights abuses, particularly against women, of missed opportunities for true democratic reform, of continued political corruption, of increased poverty and inequality, and of severe political repression and state sponsored violence against social movements and minority groups. The evidence is well documented by such organizations as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and has been broadly covered in the Mexican national media, as well as numerous international sources.

And if that were not enough, Mr. Fox also leaves behind a bungled foreign policy, having at various times insulted, or made inappropriate remarks leading to public spats with the presidents of Argentina, Cuba, Bolivia, and Venezuela.

Consider this:

1. On women's rights and state sponsored violence against women:

On May 4, 2006 about 3,000 federal, local and state police under orders from the Public Security Secretary, who in turn answers directly to the president, carried out an operation against the town of San Salvador Atenco near Mexico City. Grievous human rights abuses ensued, and two youths were confirmed killed. These facts are not controversial as they have been well documented by major international and national human rights organizations and media.

Particularly heinous were the incidents of systematic rape, and sexual and physical assault against women detained during the operation.

In a report entitled "Mexico: Violence against women and justice denied in Mexico State" Amnesty International published testimonies from some of the women of Atenco. For example: "I was arrested on 4 May in the morning. (...) They pushed me to the ground and

also kicked and punched me as well as hitting me with sticks and truncheons. They pulled my hair and stamped on me and then picked me up and pushed me face down into a police van, all the while beating me. (...) Once inside the police bus, I realized that they were beating everyone else inside it. In my case, amid all the blows, insults and pushing, they started to grope me, first around my buttocks, then to rub up against my trousers, they touched my breasts and then they put their hands inside, ripping my bra and making my nipples very sore. (...) We couldn't move and, if we did, they beat us. We've asked about filing a complaint but they took no notice of us."

The report goes on to state that "the manner in which police reportedly made most arrests – of both men and women – highlighted the serious human rights violations committed, including torture, ill-treatment and excessive use of force."

Concerning the treatment of women the report says that "the experiences described by the women interviewed by the organization show several similarities: police officers groped their private parts, bit them on the breast, forced them to strip and subjected them to vaginal and anal rape using fingers. Amnesty International was also informed that one woman was reportedly forced to have oral sex with one of the police officers. Obscene remarks and threats of a sexual nature were also common." The full report can be read at:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engamr410282006>

It is important to note that all this took place under Mr. Fox, and the systematic nature of the crimes suggests the operation was well planned and directed from the highest levels. The federal government continues to reject the recommendations of Amnesty International and other human rights bodies, and to this day no officials connected to the police operation have been brought to trial.

Then there is also the well know case of the missing and murdered women of Ciudad Juarez. Since 1993 almost 400 women and girls have been murdered in the cities of Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua, at least a third suffering sexual violence. The on-going pattern of federal negligence, corruption, and unwillingness to take meaningful action continued unchanged throughout Mr. Fox's term.

In addressing the government's response, a report entitled "Mexico: Justice fails in Ciudad Juarez and the City of Chihuahua" by Amnesty International states that "the failures are systemic -- the lack of proper investigations has led authorities to resort to torture to extract confessions where evidence is not available. This has not only led to the imprisonment of individuals who may be innocent, but also means that there is a strong likelihood that the real perpetrators are escaping justice and are free to continue to commit crimes."

Amnesty International reports on the situation in Ciudad Juarez can be found at:

<http://news.amnesty.org/index/ENGAMR410072005>

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/countries/mexico/document.do?id=engamr410122006>

2. On democratic reform:

Last summer saw the most highly contested elections in Mexican history. The main opposition candidate and party, backed by media investigations and academic research, claimed that a massive electoral fraud, directly overseen by Mr. Fox's office, took place. Their case was taken all the way to the supreme electoral tribunal in Mexico, which in spite of the recognition of major irregularities in the electoral process, sided with the candidate from Fox's ruling party, the PAN.

Some of the largest protests in Mexican history took place in the weeks following the contested elections, and to this day the opposition candidate contends that he received the majority of votes and refuses to recognize the victory of Felipe Calderon of the PAN party.

The continued political conflict was highlighted when Mr. Fox was prevented from giving his last state of the union address in Mexico City due to massive protests. This had never before happened in Mexico. Later, fist fights broke out in congress as governing party politicians fought off an effort by the opposition to prevent the swearing in of the new president.

These facts suggest that Mr. Fox's legacy is far from one of lasting democratic reform, and that, instead, he leaves the country deeply divided with the new presidency facing the greatest crisis of legitimacy in the history of the country.

3. On economic achievements:

Contrary to the claims of the Mexican government, the reality on the ground is that most Mexicans are living a period of unprecedented economic crisis. A report from the Center for North American Integration and Development at the University of California in Los Angeles concluded Mexican migrants contribute more to the economies of the U.S. and Mexico than the entire bilateral trade between them. "Since the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) more than 10 million Mexican migrants have crossed the border, and the economic contribution of these 10 million is greater than that generated by NAFTA" states Raúl Hinojosa Ojeda, one of the authors of the report.

The obvious question is, if Mexico's economy is doing well, why do Mexicans continue leaving their country in record numbers? The answer can be seen in Mexico's countryside, where economic policies carried out by the government of Mr. Fox have led to severe economic and social depression. Widespread misery abounds and given Mr. Fox's consistent de-funding of public services such as education, as well as the imposition of economic policies and capital projects that are seen to benefit only a small wealthy elite, all indications are that the situation is likely to worsen in the coming years.

4. On corruption:

Mr. Fox, his wife Mrs. Martha Sahagun, and her children have faced constant accusations of corruption. A recent example are reports in the Mexican press that a close friend of Mr. Fox, Mr. Cosme Mares Hernández, is under investigation for irregularities concerning the illegal purchase of a bay on the pacific coast of Mexico where Mr. Fox's family intends to build a tourist resort. The peasant farmers who were evicted from the area maintain they were robbed of their lands. They recently sent a letter to the new president stating that they have "all the proof" of "the abuse by Vicente Fox and Martha Sahagun". They demand that Mr. Fox and his family leave their lands alone.

Mr. Mares Hernández is also being investigated for fraud in connection with the granting of highway construction contracts all over the country to a business run by him and the sons of Mrs. Sahagun.

5. On the general human rights situation and political repression:

In addition to the above-mentioned case of San Salvador Atenco, Mr. Fox oversaw several other social uprisings where major human rights violations were well documented. The largest took place last year (2006) in the state of Oaxaca where a teacher's strike grew into a

generalized social uprising following a violent crackdown by state authorities. The response from the federal government was to send in troops and police and the resulting political repression has been the worst seen in Mexico since the Tlatelolco student massacre of 1968. Having failed to reach a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Oaxaca, Mr. Fox left it up to his successor to deal with the problem. The new government ordered a major crackdown on November 25, 2006 accompanied by human rights violations on a massive scale. Yet the conflict is likely to continue for some time as the core demands of the social movements continue to be ignored by the federal and state governments.

The International Civil Commission For Human Rights Observation recently presented its "Preliminary Conclusions and Recommendations Concerning The Social Conflict in Oaxaca" which clearly outlines some of the worst human rights violations. The document can be found at:

http://cciodh.pangea.org/quinta/070120_inf_conclusiones_recomendaciones_eng.shtml

Another hallmark of Mr. Fox's human rights record has been the growth in the number of political prisoners. According to various Mexican NGOs the number of political prisoners grew by 50% during Mr. Fox's term.

It is also worth noting that according to Reporters without Borders in "Mexico - Annual Report 2006", under Fox "the country became the most dangerous in Latin America for journalists in 2005, with two murdered and a third who vanished, all in early April. Impunity reigns despite apparent efforts by the federal government." The report can be found at:

http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=17426

In October of 2006 Brad Will, an independent journalist from the U.S., was shot dead while reporting on the conflict in Oaxaca (the estimated number of civilians killed in this conflict is 23). His killers have been identified in pictures of the incident as plain clothes police officers and ruling party operatives, and to this day have not been prosecuted for the crime.

In conclusion

We, The Other Campaign Vancouver, together with the organizations and individuals endorsing this letter, would like to re-state our request that you remove Vicente Fox and Martha Sahagun from your program. International Women's Day is a very important day for women all over the world, and having these proposed speakers profiled in a highly lucrative engagement on this day is clearly an insult and a mistake. Facts clearly demonstrate that neither Vicente Fox nor Martha Sahagun are qualified to speak on the subjects of leadership and successful democratic or economic reforms.

We thank you for your attention and look forward to your reply.

Yours truly,

The Other Campaign Vancouver
La Otra Campaña Vancouver
laotravancouver@resist.ca

The Other Campaign Vancouver is a collective of Mexicans and Canadians who work for social justice in Mexico, Canada, and other countries.

ENDORSED BY:

Building and Construction Trades Council - BC and Yukon Territory

Hospital Employees Union of B.C. (HEU)

The Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women - Canada (GAATW-Canada)

The OPEN Coalition for Human Rights in Migration and Human Trafficking

Latin America Connexions Collective - Vancouver

Building Bridges Human Rights Project - Vancouver

Social Justice Committee of the Unitarian Church of Vancouver

B.C. Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines

Filipino Nurses Support Group - Vancouver

Philippine Women Centre of B.C.

SIKLAB - B.C.

Filipino-Canadian Youth Alliance (Ugnayan ng Kabataang Pilipino sa Canada) - Vancouver

B.C. Latin-American Collective (Colectivo Latinoamericano de Colombia "Britanica")

ALAD Collective

America Latina al Dia - CFRO 102.7 FM Vancouver Co-operative Radio

Bus Riders Union - Vancouver

Grass Roots Women - Vancouver

Canadian-Cuban Friendship Association - Vancouver

Anti Poverty Committee - Vancouver

No One Is Illegal - Vancouver

No One Is Illegal - Toronto

No One is Illegal - Montreal

Block the Empire - Montreal

La Otra Campaña - Montreal

Students Taking Action in Chiapas (STAC) - Montreal

Redwire Magazine - Vancouver

International Workers of the World (IWW) Vancouver

International Indigenous Youth Conference (IIYC)

Justicia For Migrant Workers B.C.

Group of Relatives and Friends of Political Prisoners in Mexico - Vancouver

Latin American Solidarity Committee - Toronto

Circulo Bolivariano Manuelita Saenz - Toronto

Amicus Foundation - Vancouver

R.S. Ratner:

"I strongly disapprove of the invitation to President Vicente Fox and his wife to speak in Vancouver about democratic reform. Neither he nor his wife merit this invitation, given their abysmal record regarding human rights and democratic reform during the period of Fox's presidency of Mexico. The invitation should be withdrawn.

Sincerely,

R.S. Ratner
Professor Emeritus, Sociology
University of British Columbia
Vancouver, B.C.
Canada"

Tom Sandborn (Journalist and Media activist)
Vancouver, BC

Leandro Vergara-Camus, Professor. McMaster University

Paula Hevia-Pacheco, Professor. Collège Glendon, York University

Richard Roman, Professor (retired), Sociology, University of Toronto

Greg Albo, Professor, Political Science, York University