

HUMANITARIAN OPERATION¹⁵

OPERATION "LAS" COLONIAS

G.I. Forum "Operation Las Colonias" Strategy Plan

1. the decision to put operation Las Colonias into action, was made Tues June 7, 1968 by founder Dr. Hector Garcia and Nat. Chairman Mario Diaz by telephone.
2. Mario Diaz will arrive June 27, 1968 to hold a Press Conference together with Dr. Hector Garcia where both will notify the Press that the G.I. Forum will be in the Colonias in Texas to investigate complaints of critical health conditions of the Colono 250,000 population and third world economic conditions. Findings to be reported to the National Press Corp. (we will carry several cameras to use P.C.'s at Nat. Conv. to Politicians).
3. Mario Diaz will rent a large van when he arrives on 6/27/68. ON the 6/28/68 we shall depart early to arrive at the first colonia at 0800 the same day. Colonias: Lull in Edinburg, MEXIA IN Mercedes, EL Rancho + La Palma on military highway, Cameron Park in Brownsville.

LHD COLONIAS

History: COLONIAS ARE RURAL UNINCORPORATED SUBDIVISION MOST OF WHICH BEGAN IN THE 1950s. MOST ARE OUTSIDE THE FIVE-MILE EXTRATERRITORIAL JURISDICTION OF THE CITIES. THEY ARE NOT ONLY PHYSICALLY AND LEGALLY ISOLATED FROM CITY AND COUNTY GOVERNMENTAL REGULATIONS, BUT THEY ARE CHARACTERIZED BY SUBSTANDARD HOUSING, INADEQUATE PLUMBING, POOR SEWAGE DISPOSAL AND INADEQUATE ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER

MOST OF THESE SUBDIVISIONS, OR COLONIAS, BEGAN WITHOUT BA SERVICES: WATER, LIGHT OR GAS. IN MANY CASES, DEVELOPERS PROMISED THE RESIDENTS THAT UTILITIES WERE ON THE WAY, THE LAW MADE IT PARTICULARLY EASY FOR UNPRINCIPLED DEVELOPERS BEYOND THE CITY LIMITS. COUNTIES HAVE NO ZONING AUTHORITY IN TEXAS AND LITTLE REGULATORY POWER.

ESTIMATED IN STATES: CA, ARIZONA, NEW MEXICO, TEXAS
COLONIAS NUMBER 450 POPULATION 250,000

TEXAS STATE LEVEL HEARINGS IN EL PASO ²

(NOTE) NOT HEARING ON FEDERAL LEVEL

HONORABLE: RON COLEMAN, CHAIRMAN OF THE CONGRESSIONAL BERN CAUCUS ON FIELD HEARINGS (EL PASO REP.)
CONG. SALOMON ORTIZ, CONG. KIKI DE LA GARZA
HENRY NOWACK N.Y

HON. RON COLEMAN, "FIELD HEARINGS TO STUDY & BRING ATTENTION TO THE DISGRACE OF COLONIAS"

HON. JIM WRIGHT, "THERE IS NOT ANOTHER MORE SERIOUS ECONOMIC PROBLEM ANYWHERE IN THE UNITED STATES THAN THAT WHICH APPLICATES THOSE AREAS ADJACENT TO THE MEXICAN BORDER," THE FACTS BE OUT THE SPEAKER: THE COLONIAS ALONG THE BORDER ARE AMONG THE MOST DESPERATELY IMPOVERISHED COMMUNITIES IN THE UNITED STATES.

HON. LLOYD BENTSEN: SPOKE OUT IN WASHINGTON WITH OTHER TEXAS LAWMAKERS IN FAVOR OF THE CREATION OF A U.S. MEXICO REGIONAL COMMISSION TO ADDRESS ECONOMIC, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS ON THE BORDER. BENTSEN ALSO INTRODUCED LEGISLATION TO ESTABLISH A HEALTH EDUCATION & TRAINING PROGRAM ON THE U.S./MEX BORDER.

HON. Lloyd BENTSON: SENATE PASSED LEGISLATION WHICH BENTSON AUTHORED TO TARGET ADDITIONAL RESOURCES UNDER A MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH PROGRAM TO COLONIA AREA. IT WILL ADDRESS THE CRITICAL INFANT MORTALITY PROBLEM IN THE AREA AND GREATLY IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF THE AREA'S INFANTS.

Pending Legislation

OCT. 21, 1987 Hon Solomon P. Ortiz introduced to the House of Representatives, Colonia Water and Sewer Service Act of 1987. The Act is now before the Agriculture Committee where Kika De La Garza is Chairman. Cong. Ortiz is trying to get Nat. Hearings in Washington. The next step would be to get the desired number of votes from the Agriculture Committee to bring it to the floor of the House of Rep.

Funding Cuts: yet last year Congress froze the appropriations that support the seven Federally funded health clinics in the region. And the National Health Service Corps, the fed program that supplies 85 percent of the health centers' doctors was abolished by the Reagan Administration.

Assistant Surgeon General David Sundwall: visited the border last Dec., he was so shocked by the conditions there that he immediately authorized a Border Health Initiative. Provide money for health projects. But is only \$2 million the BHI Pot, and that money must be stretched from Texas to California.

Newsweek Author, Frank Gibney Jr., "Embarrassing National Publicity about Third World Horrors in El Paso County has Reached a High Pitch!"

LAS COLONIAS MEDIA ATTENTION:

1974
U.S. News & World Report, About third-world conditions South Texas.

1979
Time Magazine did a Colonias story.

1988
Newsweek covered the subject

1988
Corpus Christi Caller Times May 19, 1988: Editorial "There's A REAL Need for border Commission" Quoting House speaker Jim Wright and U.S. Sen. Lloyd Bentsen in favor of the creation of a U.S.-Mexico border region Federal Commission to address Las Colonias, the most desperate impoverished communities in the United States.
Life Magazine: is supposed to have written on this subject

Colonias Health Conditions (2)

Newsweek: June 8, 1987 IN TEXAS, A GRIM NEW APPALACHIA
DESPERATE LIVES IN THE NATION'S POOREST REGION.
"IN 1964, Pres. Lyndon Johnson declared AMERICA'S FIRST WAR ON POVERTY with a battery of laws to improve education and attack hunger and disease, from urban ghettos to the hazy, gritty valleys of Appalachia. IF JOHNSON could witness what is happening in his native Texas today, however, he ~~would~~ would surely shudder - "EVEN IN THE dry, 100-degree heat of Spring Kids have the wheezing cough of poverty." That cough echoes up and down the U.S. border with Mexico, a poverty belt more desperate than even Appalachia".

Doctors in the valley work overtime controlling basic illnesses normally seen only in developing countries. Their patients lack education and high cost of medicine make health care a Sisyphean task.

Cover

LAS COLONIAS HEALTH FINDINGS TO DATE: (1)

Hon. Solomon P. Ortiz: "Water obtained from these wells inevitably becomes seriously contaminated, resulting in rates of dysentery and hepatitis estimated to be double the national average for those who can avoid infection by these diseases, skin rashes, infection, diarrhea, and nausea are commonplace. (also open sores)

Dr. Herbert Ortega, regional director of the U.N. affiliate Pan American Health Organization. "What we are talking is a third world within our border. This is a very serious problem that can no longer be ignored locally or nationally."

Ed Pfifer, director of the Valley's irrigation district, "dysentery, hepatitis and lice here are twice the regional average. Many children and their parents have dark yellow stains on their teeth. All of this is attributable in large part to the water contaminated with "fecal matter"

LAS COLONIAS HEALTH FINDINGS TO DATE: (CONTINUED)

Rafaela Harvey, a public health nurse in the area colonia, noted that 85 percent of the children from Sparks suffered from skin rashes, yeast infections, insect bites, diarrhea or vomiting.

Falwest Sprester, an environmental engineer for the El Paso City-Country Health Department, thinks he knows why (the children at Sparks were infected) Sprester conducted a study of Sparks addition that showed that 51 percent of the residents stored water in 55-gallon drums obtained from various sources in Mexico and the United States. "About 70% were labeled indicating the contents were toxic, such as methylene chloride, Stoddard solvent and trichloroethane. Several children were treated for skin rashes caused by chemically contaminated clothes after the clothes were washed in these drums"

LAS COLONIAS HEALTH FINDINGS TO DATE (CONTINUED) ⑨

It is Hernandez, executive director of the Hidalgo County Health Care Corporation, "It's like we live in a forgotten land down here,"

Legal Aid to Colonias: The Texas Rural Legal Aid attorney EVONNE CHARBONNEAU, legal aid lawyer, "In some cases the water is so bad that even using it for bathing can make people sick. (The water was contaminated with fecal matter)"

Texas Water Development Board, according to a recent study by the Texas Water Development Board, it would take 30 years and at least \$200 million just to bring clean water and sewage lines to all 400 of the existing Colonias.

Las Colonias Health Findings to date (CONTINUED) ⑩

Author
Frank Gibney Jr. Only 3.5 percent of the colonia residents use Medicaid. As a result, many colonia dwellers depend on the Valley's private hospitals, where profits are important. These hospitals usually demand a deposit: cold cash, a lien on a patient's truck or, as was the case at one hospital, a patient's silver belt buckle.

The fertility rate in the Colonias is estimated at twice the national average, and infant mortality is high, ten percent. The nation's out-of-hospital births occur in Hidalgo and Cameron counties, which contain only two-tenths of 1 percent of the nation's population. If pregnant women receive prenatal care, it is usually not until they are well in pregnancy, and often ill mothers give birth to babies with a variety of sicknesses and disorders. For example, a disproportionate number of colonia babies are born partially deaf from middle-ear infections.

Appendix 1

List of Contacts in Texas that work with "Colonias"

1. Texas Health Department (Region III)
El Paso (915) 779-8016
Steve McAndrew, Tom Grimshaw
2. Texas Health Department (Region VIII)
Hardington (512) 423-0130
Jake Rathmell
3. Texas Health Department (Region VI)
(512) 278-7173
Raymond Whitley
4. Laredo-Webb County Health Department
(512) 723-2051
Victor Oliveros
5. El Paso County Health Department
(915) 541-4989
Dr. Laurence Micky
6. Texas Water Commission
Austin (512) 463-7791
Jack Kramer
7. Texas Water Development Board
(512) 463-7868
Dr. Herb Grubb
8. Lower Rio Grande Development Council
(512) 682-3481
Jim Smith
9. Charles Trost

ACTIVE ORGANIZATION IN LAS COLONIAS

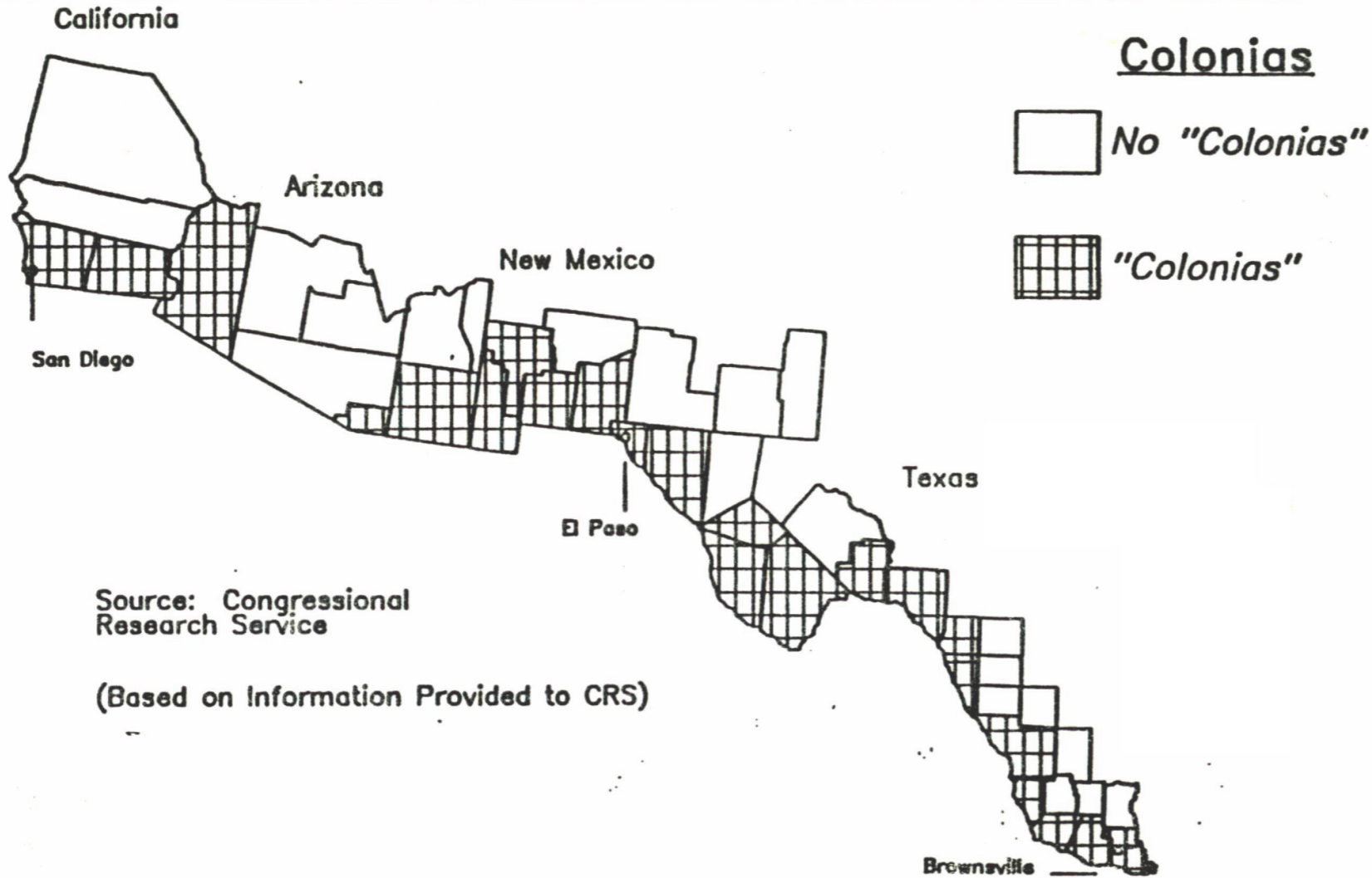
EPI SO, the EL PASO INTERRELIGIOUS SPONSORING ORGANIZATION, ONE OF TEXAS' COMMUNITY ACITIONGM FOUNDed by ERNIE COTTES, a disciple of ORGANIZER SAUL ALINSKY. (EPI SO), A SISTER ORGANIZATION OF SAN ANTONIO'S CO PS, VALLEY INTERFAITH, AND HOUSTO TMO, EPI SO SINCE THE EARLY EIGHTIES HAS PLAYED THE ROLE OF PRINCIPLE GOAD IN EL PASO'S COLONIA WATER DRAMA.

DHS

PARTNERSHIP FOR SELF-SUFFICy, A PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR INITIATIVE TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF COLONIA RESIDENTS. MANICELA ORTIZ, PROJECT MANAGER. DH IS SERVING AS A CATALYST TO ORGANIZE A TASK FORCE WITH PEOPLE FROM THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR. THE FIRST EFFOR WILL BE MADE IN LULL AND ROBLVIGUEZ COLONIAS, LOCATED NEAR EDINBURG. DHS + HIDALGO COUNTY CONDUCTED A SURVEY OF NEEDS IN LULL. THE W DONE IN THESE COLONIAS WILL SERVE AS MODEL FOR OTHER COLONIAS.

Figure 1

Border State Counties with Colonias



Source: Congressional Research Service

(Based on Information Provided to CRS)

CRS-6

AMERICAN G.I. FORUM
HUMANITARIAN OPERATION
"LAS COLONIAS"