

## **Inter-American Commission on Human Rights asked to Prevent a Public Health Crisis in La Oroya, Peru**

**March 2005 study finds 99 percent of town's children poisoned by lead.**

**NOVEMBER 21, 2005** – The Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense, along with participating organizations Earthjustice and the Center for Human Rights and Environment, asked the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) on behalf of a group of La Oroya residents, to take action to protect the right to life and health of residents of La Oroya, Peru.

The population in La Oroya is seriously affected by contamination from the operation of a lead and copper smelter. Specifically, the organizations asked that the Commission demand that the government of Peru:

- Provide adequate health examinations and medical attention for the citizens of La Oroya;
- Implement educational and health programs;
- Ensure appropriate evaluation and monitoring of the “Environmental Management and Mitigation Plan” proposed by the company;
- Effectively control air emissions from the complex;
- Evaluate the contamination levels in homes; and
- Take additional measures needed to ensure that the blood lead levels of La Oroya residents meet international health standards.

The need to take action on behalf of this Andean city, located 175 km east of Lima, stems from the extreme amount of contamination that the smelter generates, particularly lead, arsenic, cadmium, and sulfur dioxide.

Since 1999, the Government of Peru has known that almost all the children living near the complex suffer from lead poisoning, yet has taken no action to remedy the situation. A March 2005 study again showed that 99 percent of the children tested had blood lead levels vastly exceeding the limits established by the US EPA and the World Health Organization.

“We are looking to lower the high levels of lead and other contaminants such as cadmium, arsenic and sulfur dioxide in the city. These generate serious public health problems, including high levels of respiratory illness such as asthma and bronchitis,” affirmed Earthjustice attorney Martin Wagner.

According to Romina Picolotti, CEDHA President, “instead of protecting the health of its citizens, the Peruvian government has delayed the implementation of measures to control the contamination, and has failed to enforce health and environmental laws.” “This lack of action has increased the risk to health, life, and physical integrity suffered by citizens in La Oroya”, added Fernanda Doz Costa, attorney with CEDHA.

In April 2005, a Peruvian court ordered the State to take measures to protect the population, but this order was appealed and no action has been taken.

“There can be no doubt that the severe injuries caused by the contamination in La Oroya violates the residents’ fundamental human rights,” said Earthjustice attorney Martin Wagner. “Action by the Inter-American Commission could protect thousands of children and other victims from further injury.”

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