

SEPTEMBER 1, 1961

DIRECTOR OF URBAN RENEWAL  
OFFICE OF THE URBAN RENEWAL DEPT.  
WASHINGTON, DL. C.

DEAR SIR:

I HAVE BEEN APPROACHED BY SEVERAL FAMILIES IN MERCEDES, TEXAS AND THE LOCAL GROUP OF THE AMERICAN GI FORUM OF THE UNITED STATES CONCERNING THE URBAN RENEWAL PROJECT IN MERCEDES. THEY HAVE ASKED ME TO REQUEST YOUR DEPARTMENT TO SEND AN INVESTIGATOR TO MERCEDES, TEXAS, TO DISCUSS WITH THEM THE SITUATION AND THE STATUS OF THE URBAN RENEWAL PROGRAM IN THAT AREA AS IT AFFECTS THEM DIRECTLY.

THE AMERICAN GI FORUM IS A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES, MOST OF US BEING AMERICAN CITIZENS OF MEXICAN ORIGIN.

THE MAIN COMPLAINT THAT WE WOULD LIKE TO HAVE INVESTIGATED IS THE FACT THAT ACCORDING TO SOME OF THESE PEOPLE THEY WERE PROMISED MONEY AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR THEIR PROPERTY IF THEY WOULD GO ALONG WITH THE PROGRAM.. ACCORDING TO THEM, ONCE THE PROGRAM WAS APPROVED THOSE CONDITIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS WERE CHANGED AND THE PROMISES WERE NOT FULFILLED.

THE SECOND COMPLAINT IS THAT THESE PEOPLE WERE NOT GIVEN HOMES OR ENOUGH MONEY TO AT LEAST BUILD NEW HOMES COMPARABLE TO THE ONES THAT THEY WERE ASKED TO MOVE OUT FROM.

THIRD, THAT SOME OF THOSE SUPPOSEDLY SUB-STANDARD HOMES WHICH WERE TAKEN OUT OF THIS AREA ARE BEING BROUGHT BACK IN TOWN WHICH IS CONTRARY TO THE INTENT OF THE URBAN RENEWAL PROGRAM.

FOURTH, THAT THE REASON FOR CLEANING THIS AREA IS THAT A PARK WOULD BE BUILT THERE, BUT THAT THEY HAVE NOT SEEN ANY SPECIFIC PLANS FOR THIS PARK DEVELOPMENT AND IT IS RUMORED THAT THEY WILL PUT UP A TRAILOR PARK WHICH WAS NOT THE ORIGINAL INTENT OF THIS PROGRAM.

FIFTH, THAT SOME OF THE RESIDENTS OF THIS AREA WERE NOT NOTIFIED THAT THERE WOULD EVEN BE AN ELECTION.

SIXTH, I BELIEVE THAT THE PEOPLE WHO COMPLAINED HERE CERTAINLY HAVE NOT BEEN PAID ADEQUATELY FOR THEIR PROPERTY. I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN IN FAVOR OF URBAN RENEWAL, BUT IN ALL JUSTIFICATIONS I BELIEVE THAT INJUSTICES ARE BEING MADE AND THEY SHOULD BE CORRECTED.

I WISH YOUR INVESTIGATOR OR INSPECTOR WOULD TALK INDIVIDUALLY TO THESE PEOPLE AND CHECK INTO THEIR COMPLAINTS. THE FOLLOWING NAMES AND ADDRESSES ARE THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE REQUESTED ME TO INFORM YOU AND TO ASK YOU.

EVIDENTALLY, MR. & MRS. OSCAR L. GARCES, RESIDING IN 404 SOUTH PALM, MERCEDES, TEXAS, HAVE FOR QUITE A WHILE TRIED TO MAKE ARRANGEMENTS TO THE URBAN RENEWAL COMMISSION IN MERCEDES TO GET A DECENT SETTLEMENT, BUT UP TO NOW MRS. GARCES EXPLAINS THE OFFERS MADE TO THEM HAVE NOT ONLY BEEN UNREASONABLE BUT NOT IN ACCORD TO WHAT THEY WERE PROMISED AT FIRST. MRS. GARCES AND HER HUSBAND CLAIM THAT AT THE BEGINNING THE MAYOR OF THE TOWN APPROACHED THEM AND PROMISED THEM A LOT, AND MRS. GARCES CLAIMS THAT WITH THE AMOUNT OF MONEY SHE IS OFFERED NOW THAT SHE IS NOT ABLE TO BUY A LOT ON THE OTHER PART OF TOWN. SHE ALSO COMPLAINS OF THE FACT THAT SHE WAS ORDERED TO PAY \$30 FOR THIS HEARING WHICH I AM STILL NOT ABLE TO UNDERSTAND. MRS. GARCES STATES THAT MR. RIPLEN, THE MAYOR OF THE CITY, TOLD THEM TO PICK A LOT THAT WOULD NOT COST MORE THAN \$1000. SHE THEREFORE WENT AHEAD AND FOUND A LOT THAT ONLY COST \$750. SHE WAS TOLD THAT IN THIS LOT SHE WOULD GET THE SEWER CONNECTIONS AND EVEN THAT HER PLANTS WOULD BE MOVED. MRS. GARCES ASKED THE MAYOR FOR A WRITTEN STATEMENT ABOUT THESE PROMISES BUT SHE NEVER WAS ABLE TO GET THIS WRITTEN STATEMENT. I HAVE EVEN MORE OR LESS AGREED THAT SHE WOULD GET THE MONEY FOR THE LOT. THE APPRAISALS OFFERED HER ONLY \$400 TO BUY A LOT. MRS. GARCES AND THE OTHER PLAINTIFFS STATE THAT YOU CAN NOT BUY ANY DECENT LOT IN MERCEDES FOR THAT AMOUNT. WHEN SHE WENT TO TALK TO THE ATTORNEY FOR THE URBAN RENEWAL SHE WAS TOLD THAT SHE WOULD HAVE TO PAY FOR ALL THE CONNECTIONS, FOR THE INSTALLATIONS OF GAS, WATER, SEWER, AND LIGHT. SHE SAID WITH HER HUSBAND MAKING ONLY \$40 A WEEK SHE IS NOT ABLE TO MOVE UNDER THE CONDITIONS THAT THEY ARE TRYING TO MAKE HER MOVE. MRS. GARCES CLAIMS THAT THE MINIMUM A LOT COSTS IN MERCEDES IS \$600. THEREFORE, MRS. GARCES

WANTS TO KNOW WHY SHE WAS PROMISED SOMETHING FIRST AND THEN THESE PROMISES WERE NOT KEPT. MRS. GARCES ALSO CLAIMS THAT SHE HAS NOT BEEN TREATED RIGHT BY MEMBER OF THE COMMISSION. MRS. GARCES BELIEVES THAT IF SHE WERE GIVEN \$700 TO BUY THE LOT AND GIVEN AN OPPORTUNITY TO MOVE THE HOUSE THAT THAT WOULD BE A FAIR SOLUTION.

WHILE MRS. GARCES IS ABLE TO UNDERSTAND AS TO WHY SHE WAS MADE ALL THESE PROMISES THAT WERE NEVER KEPT, SHE ALSO CLAIMS THAT INSTEAD OF TRYING TO TREAT HER NICELY THEY ARE ALWAYS THREATNING TO TAKE HER INTO COURT.

THE SECOND PERSON COMPLAINING ABOUT THE SITUATION, MR. PEDRO RAMIREZ, SAID THAT HE HAS BEEN OFFERED A TOTAL OF \$1250, A CORNER LOT, 84 x 112, \$975, AND FOR THE OTHER LOT OF 30 x 112 THEY ARE GIVEN \$70.00. HE SAID THAT THE OFFER OF \$1250 WOULD NOT GO A LONG WAY BECAUSE HIS HOUSE AND ONE LOT ARE WORTH MUCH MORE THAN THAT AND THAT THE CHEAPEST LOT THEY CAN BUY RIGHT NOW OF A 50-FOOT FRONT IS ABOUT \$700. THEREFORE THEY SAY THAT THEY WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO BUILD A HOUSE AND GET A LOT FOR THE AMOUNT OF MONEY THEY ARE BEING OFFERED.

ISRAEL ARGUELLES, BOX 744, COMPLAINS OF THE FACT BECAUSE HE SAYS THAT WHAT HE IS BEING OFFERED FOR A LOT NOW ISN'T EVEN WHAT HE PAID 10 YEARS AGO. HE SAYS THAT HE HAS A CORNER LOT OF 40 x 140 FEET AND THEY GIVE THEM ONLY \$270. FOR THE OTHER ONE, \$250; A TOTAL OF \$520. WITH THIS AMOUNT OF MONEY HE CAN NOT EVEN BUY A SINGLE LOT MUCH LESS BUILD A HOUSE OR MOVE HIS HOUSE TO THAT AREA. MR. ARGUELLES SAYS THAT HE WAS PROMISED MUCH MORE THAN THAT.

ELVIRA GARCIA, 834 GARZA, SAYS SHE HAS BEEN OFFERED FOR TWO LOTS AND A HOUSE \$540. SHE SAYS THAT WHEN SHE BOUGHT THIS PROPERTY SHE PAID MORE THAN \$400 FOR IT. NATURALLY, STATED PREVIOUSLY BY THE OTHER PERSONS, FOR \$540 SHE CERTAINLY ISN'T BUYING A LOT MUCH LESS MOVE HER HOUSE OR BUILD A NEW HOME.

JOSE GUTIERREZ, 544 PALM ST., ALSO HAS A COMPLAINT TO MAKE.

JUANITA GARCIA, 531 So. PALM ST., SAYS SHE HAS BEEN OFFERED \$1675 FOR A HOUSE AND THREE LOTS. HOWEVER, LATER ON THEY TOLD HER THAT THEY WOULD GIVE HER ONLY \$1250 FOR HER THREE LOTS PLUS THE TWO OTHER LOTS THAT WERE UNDER THE NAME OF HER

DAUGHTERS. AT FIRST MRS. GARCIA'S DAUGHTERS HAD BEEN PROMISED \$400 BY A JESUS REYES WHO IS WORKING FOR THE URBAN RENEWAL IN MERCEDES. MRS. GARCIA, 64 YEARS OF AGE, A WIDOW, FEELS THAT INJUSTICES ARE BEING DONE AND THAT SHE IS NOT ABLE TO MOVE INTO A NEW PROPERTY.

FOR INVESTIGATION THIS REQUEST WAS MADE TO ME BY THIS PEOPLE MENTIONED HERE IN A MEETING AT DONNA, TEXAS. THERE ARE OTHER PEOPLE IN THIS AREA WHO HAVE SOME COMPLAINTS TO MAKE TO YOUR INVESTIGATOR OR INSPECTOR. MRS. GARCIA WILL FURNISH HIM THE NAMES AND ADDRESSES WHEN HE GETS THERE.

I AM VERY DISAPPOINTED THAT THESE PEOPLE FEEL SO BITTER ABOUT THE URBAN RENEWAL PROGRAM IN MERCEDES. WE ARE A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION AND FOR MANY YEARS WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN IN FAVOR OF URBAN RENEWAL PROGRAMS OF THE COMMUNITY. WE HAVE ALWAYS PARTICIPATED LARGELY FOR THE PROGRAM. I HOPE THAT THIS SITUATION IS CLEARED UP IN ORDER THAT WE MAY STILL HAVE FAITH IN YOUR PROGRAM. PLEASE KEEP ME INFORMED, AND MEANWHILE PLEASE ADVISE THE URBAN RENEWAL COMMISSION AN COMPLAINT IN MERCEDES HAS BEEN FILED.

SINCERELY YOURS,

HECTOR P. GARCIA, M. D.

HPG/MS