

Los Olvidados de Hidalgo, english transcription, N+ Focus

Voice Over:

Sewage from Mexico City and industrial corridors waters have created an environmental hell in the north of Tula for 40 years.

Although the authorities knew that the water from their wells was killing the residents of the Endhó dam, they simply ignored them.

Person 1: I'm a resident of the Endhó Dam and my sister Patricia Jimenez died of breast and liver cancer.

Person 2: I'm a bone cancer survivor.

Person 3: Currently I have breast cancer.

Person 4: My brother and my wife died of cancer.

Person 5: My wife died of cancer.

Person 6: I'm a cancer survivor.

Person 7: My mother died of stomach cancer.

Person 8: My mother died of liver and skin cancer.

Person 9: I'm a uterine cervix cancer survivor.

Person 10: I have breast cancer.

Person 11: My father in law and my mother died of cancer.

Person 12: My father died of cáncer.

Person 13: I'm a breast cancer survivor.

Person 14: I have breast cancer and I live in the Endhó Dam.SUPER:

*LOS OLVIDADOS DE HIDALGO
(THE FORGOTTEN ONES OF HIDALGO)*

SUPER: Yuri Uribe, activist and resident of the Endhó dam.

Yuri Uribe: I'm starting to worry about the situation when my daughter is born; when his teeth began to come out, they began to peel off... I went to the doctor and he told me: "To your daughter, it is difficult to adapt to such a polluted place".

Yuri Uribe: It's not the only illness. The residents of the Endho Dam have several illnesses that originated in the contamination, like allergies, vision problems, several cancer problems...

Voice Over:

In the 1950s, the inhabitants were expelled to the highlands to build the Endhó dam. In the 1970s, sewage from Mexico City and industrial waters from the Tula Combined Cycle Thermoelectric Power Plant, the Miguel Hidalgo refinery and the hundreds of factories in the Tula – Atitalaquia – Tepeji industrial corridor were channeled towards the Endhó dam. Every year, 326 million cubic meters of wastewater arrive at the dam, almost double its capacity, and it is used to irrigate the Mezquital Valley.

Reporter 1: Years ago, this dam was a tourist place... right now, it's only full of black waters.

Voice Over:

Since 1988 we have denounced the contamination of the dam and the effects on the health of the neighbors.

Person 15: Sometimes, when the water comes clean, we have to reserve it to clean and do the dishes, because when it comes dirty, not even to clean works.

Voice Over:

Scientific studies have shown that one of the main effects of chronic exposure to pollutants is cancer.

SUPER: Magdalena Jiménez Cruz, cancer patient and resident of the Endhó dam.

Magdalena Jiménez: It was pure crystal wáter, clean water. This field was for planting. Corn, brown beans, green beans... It was so beautiful. When we were kids we came here to play soccer. All the kids of the village. Later, when they channeled the sewage, it's all over and all the fishes died. My home is about 300 meters from the dam. In the afternoon comes an unbearably strong smell... I believe that all the illnesses that the residents have are because of the dam contamination.

Voice Over:

Since 2007 there have been official reports on the presence of contaminants in the wells and various diseases that affect 15,000 residents of the dam.

Magdalena Jiménez: The pollution comes from Mexico City and its sewer tunnels; then the industrial waters from the factories; and then in Tula, we have the refinery and the thermoelectric plant. All these pollutants end here, in the Endhó dam.

SUPER: Hugo Rosario Jiménez, day laborer and Magdalena 's nephew. Resident of the Endhó dam.

Hugo Rosario Jimenez: Unfortanilly, my aunty has cancer, breast cancer. We don't have enough money for the treatment, so we have organized small fundraising events in the community, like kermes, raffles, rodeos... The water comes so polluted that animals can't graze around the dam because there grows a herb that is very infectious and if the animals eat this herb the animals are inflated and then die. It's water that cannot be drinked, it not works for us.

Voice Over:

Maira, a resident of the Endhó dam, has had cancer since two years ago. With the help of her sister Silvia, she fights against the disease.

SUPER: Maira Martínez Sánchez, cancer patient and resident of the Endhó dam.

Maira Martínez Sánchez: I got breast cancer. At the beginning it was very difficult to get medical attention at the hospital. My treatment, even with my social economy situation, was above half million pesos [approx 250,000 dollars]. I told my sister that we can't afford it and we searched for other options. We came again with the general doctor and she directed me to the INCAN [Instituto Nacional de Cancerología / National Cancer Institute]. They told me that I have 4 stage cancer. And every eight days I got chemotherapy. Every eight days.

SUPER: Silvia Martínez Sánchez, cancer patient 's sister and resident of the Endhó dam.

Silvia Martínez Sánchez: I sell donations for other neighbors from the community, for supporting my sister. I came house by house. We sold enchiladas, tacos, sopes... every trip to the hospital is about 3,000 pesos [approx 150 dollars]. We have four trips next month. Medical consultation in palliative care, radiotherapy, medical visit with the oncologist and general studies.

Maira Martínez Sánchez: Finally, I was getting better, but the doctor told me "you have metastasis, in the brain". It feels horrible, because I was getting better and now...

Wall Text: Maira died at the end of 2022.

Voice Over:

According to IMSS [Mexican Social Security Institute] statistics, in the municipalities contaminated by the dam, the refinery and other industries, deaths from cancer, kidney and respiratory diseases tripled. These are not the only signs of deteriorating health among the residents of the dam in recent years...

Yuri Uribe: There are water quality studies conducted in 2007 that establish that two drinking water wells, General Pedro Maria Anaya, where I live, and El Torrior, are not fit for human consumption. The communities, organized in the Movimiento Social por la Tierra, demonstrated during 2017 and 2018. In May 2018 came the National Water Laboratory and conducted water quality tests in communities' seven drinking water wells...

and all are polluted with heavy metal above the rules. None is fit for human consumption. The authorities didn't do anything.

Voice Over:

In September 2018, Conagua [Comisión Nacional del Agua / National Water Commission] notified Governor Omar Fayad and the municipal presidents of Tula and Tepetitlán that the seven wells were contaminated, but the authorities ignored the problem.

Yuri Uribe: When we see that the state Administration has no interest in solving this situation and also the Federal Government and Conagua, We achieve a budget for agricultural improves and they awarded 30 millions pesos [1.5 million dollars] to solve the water drinking wells problem. On five of the seven polluted wells were installed water treatment plants. The sixth well, El Torreon, was supposedly substituted, but they did nothing with Xochitlan and people are still using polluted water. In 2019, the authorities told us that everything was ok, but now, on May 21, we realized that some of the water treatment plants are not working because they built them incomplete.

Voice Over:

After losing the majority of Congress, Fayad, as Governor, opposed the budget in which those 30 million were allocated.

Voice Over:

Pablo Octavio Aguilar, a geneticist at the University of Hidalgo, has studied the health effects of having permanent contact with water contaminated by heavy metals.

SUPER: Pablo Octavio Aguilar, geneticist and co-author of “Effects on health of water contaminated by heavy metals”.

Pablo Octavio Aguilar: We have arsenic, a metalloid that enters through the skin or by ingestion. It can give skin cancer. Lead generates plumbism and, in chronic phases, causes tooth loss, blackening of the gums... Mercury directly affects the nervous system and when the accumulation is excessive it also causes cancer. In places where there is chronic exposure like this, the cases are likely to be proportionally very high.

Yuri Uribe: We believe that when the Government knows that is an urgent situation, if the problem is money, it would be money to fix it.

Voice Over:

In July 2019, Victor Manuel Toledo, then Federal Environment secretary, met with the residents of the Endhó dam.

Victor Manuel Toledo: The Endhó dam, that receives the sewage from Mexico City, it's in a really deplorable state that makes this region inhabitable and where it is impossible to have a dignified life.

Voice Over:

Toledo promised to achieve an Environmental Restoration Declaration for the area, signed by the president of Mexico.

*Toledo resigned from Semarnat in August 2020.
In his place came Maria Luisa Albores, former Welfare secretary.*

President López Obrador: Maria Luisa.

Super: Maria Luisa Albores, Federal Environment Secretary.

Maria Luisa Albores: Thanks, thanks a lot, graduated Lopez Obrador, president of Mexico.

Yuri Uribe: Albores became Secretary and she never talked to us. Never.

Voice Over:

In July 2021, an agreement was signed between Conacyt [Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología / National Council for Science and Technology], the Ministry of Health and Semarnat [Secretaria de Medio Ambiente / Federal Environment Secretary] to establish a series of Sanitary and Environmental Emergency Regions in the country, which would include the Endhó dam... their last meeting was in March 2022 and to the date they have not established any restoration program....

Super: Julio Menchaca, Governor of Hidalgo.

Julio Menchaca: It's been a deposit of heavy materials, not just organic material, also chemical products that harm the environment. The most urgent actions are health related, because it's what the residents want. We assume this responsibility and we will take actions.

Voice Over:

The residents of the Endhó dam continue to face their problems in oblivion.

Super: Juan Francisco Vilchis, day laborer and farmer.

Juan Francisco Vilchis: I live half kilometer from the dam. I would like the authorities to turn to us, the people that live in this area of the dam. I could have any disease, really sick, and don't know about it, because of all the pollution. It's quite complicated to live in the Endhó dam.

Voice Over:

Cancer and other diseases persist among those who live near the dam... they think that the authorities have already broken too many promises.

Meanwhile, the black waters continue to run.