



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ruben Diaz

Statement by New York State Senator Reverend Ruben Diaz

[RUBEN DIAZ](#) September 6, 2009

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Saturday, September 5, 2009

Patchogue, New York

This past Tuesday night, the Iglesia Evangelical Refugio de Salvacion was burglarized. The criminals involved left a note on the altar of this church with anti-Hispanic comments.

This is not an isolated incident.

While this church was being vandalized, the Southern Poverty Law Center released a report that documents what is a serious problem in Patchogue, is a growing national problem.

Mark Potok, the director of the Intelligence Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, begins the report with the following:

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“Less than one year ago, on Nov. 8, 2008, Marcelo Lucero, an Ecuadorian immigrant, was murdered in the town of Patchogue, N.Y. The killing, police say, was carried out by a gang of teenagers who called themselves the Caucasian Crew and targeted Latino residents as part of a sport they termed “beaner-hopping.” It highlighted a growing national problem — violent hatred directed at all suspected undocumented immigrants, Latinos in particular. Officials in Suffolk County, N.Y., where Patchogue is located, minimized the tragedy, with the county executive even suggesting that it would have been a mere “one-day story” if not for earlier publicity about his and other residents’ anti-immigrant activism over the prior decade.

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But the reality was that nativist intolerance and hate violence had been festering for years in Suffolk County, fostered by some of the very same officials who were now wishing the story away. The situation in Suffolk County, in fact, is a microcosm of a problem facing the entire United States, where FBI statistics suggest a 40% rise in anti-Latino hate crimes between 2003 and 2007, the latest numbers available. The number of hate groups in America has been rising, too climbing more than 50% since 2000, mainly by exploiting the issue of undocumented, non-white immigration.

Mr. Potok continues:

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“Latino immigrants in Suffolk County are regularly harassed, taunted, and pelted with objects hurled from cars. They are frequently run off the road while riding bicycles, and many report being beaten with baseball bats and other objects. Others have been shot with BB guns or pepper-sprayed. Most will not walk alone after dark; parents often refuse to let their children play outside. A few have been the targets of arson attacks and worse.”

An then:

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Fueling the fire are many of the very people who are charged with protecting the residents of Suffolk County — local politicians and law enforcement officials. At one point, one county legislator said that if he saw an influx of Latino day laborers in his town, “we’ll be out with baseball bats.” Another said that if Latino workers were to gather in a local neighborhood, “I would load my gun and start shooting, period.” A third publicly warned undocumented residents that they “better beware.” County Executive Steve Levy, the highest-ranking official in Suffolk, is no friend of immigrants, either. When criticized by a group of immigrant advocates, for example, Levy called the organization a den of “Communists” and “anarchists.”

The Southern Poverty Law Center has made the following recommendations that I would like to amplify here today, and ask you all to make these recommendations a reality:

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“First, local politicians should halt their angry demagoguery on the issue of immigration. There is abundant evidence that Suffolk County officials have contributed substantially to an atmosphere conducive to racial violence.

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Second, the county and state legislatures should mandate that crime victims and witnesses not be asked their immigration status during criminal investigations. As long as they are, immigrants will be unwilling to come out of the shadows to report crimes against themselves and others.

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Third, law enforcement officials should train officers to ensure that they take seriously cases of hate-motivated crime. Until they do, Latino residents will continue to distrust law enforcement officials and avoid cooperation.

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Fourth, the county should maintain accurate hate crime statistics that are readily available to the public. Doing so will help guide county leaders and residents in confronting the problem of hate-motivated violence.

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Fifth, the county should promote educational programs in the public schools to encourage respect for diversity and opposition to hatred. In the end, educating the next generation is the only permanent antidote to hate.

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If these measures are taken to combat an increasingly volatile situation, it's likely that angry passions in Suffolk can be cooled and a rational debate on immigration and its consequences

begun. The alternative is that the county continues to foster a dangerous growth of violent racial intolerance and nativism — a climate of fear.”

During the next few months, Members of the New York Hispanic Clergy and I intend to meet with as many local leaders, public officials, police chiefs, and district attorneys as we can. Our intention is to actively engage the community to put an end to racial intolerance in Long Island.

For firther information, please contact Senator Rev. Ruben Diaz at 718/496-4793.

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