

CANADIAN COMPANY AFTER GOLD IN GUATEMALA

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The Social Justice Committee (Montreal, Canada) received a request from a Guatemalan coalition to help them in their struggle against an open pit gold mine started by a Canadian corporation in the land used by their communities. The Government of Guatemala gave a mining permit to the company, without the previous and informed consent of the affected communities.

Let us show our solidarity with the people of Guatemala affected by the actions of a Canadian corporation and the ineffectiveness of their own government.

The Social Justice Committee is requesting sign-ons for this letter preferably by Monday, November 1st, but would gladly accept them in the days following, as long as it arrives before the press conference officially announcing the letter in Guatemala.

Please send:

Name of your organization

Address (including City and Country)

email:

phone:

Please take a look at the letter and info on the campaign below.

Thanks.

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Open letter to the President of Guatemala:

November 2004

Lic. Oscar Berger, President of the Republic of Guatemala

Dear Mr President,

We write to you as friends of the Guatemalan people. We wish to express our support for the members of the "Frente por la Vida" Coalition, who have informed us about the arrival of a mining company, Montana Exploradora, a subsidiary of Glamis Gold and the start of the Marlin gold and silver

mining

project in the Department of San Marcos (municipalities of San Miguel Ixtahuacán and Sipacapa). We understand that the Government of Guatemala

issued a permit for this open pit mine, without the prior and informed consent of the Mam and Sipacapense indigenous people who live in those municipalities.

The Frente has asked the international community for support in their demand

that the Government of Guatemala fulfill its obligations according to Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO), which it has

signed and ratified. Convention 169 states that Indigenous Peoples "have the

right to decide their own priorities for the process of development as it

affects the lands they occupy or otherwise use". It also says that

"they

shall participate in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of plans

and programmes for national and regional development which may affect them

directly."

Based on the rights accorded to them by Convention 169, the Frente por la

Vida coalition asks that your government:

Halt further work on the Marlin mine pending the full and informed participation of local communities in the formulation, implementation and

evaluation of the plans and programmes for this open pit gold mine.

Change the Mining Law to include a prior and informed consent from the affected indigenous communities for any mining exploration and exploitation

permit. The Mining Law should also ban the use of cyanide, which has been

prohibited in the state of Montana in the USA. In addition, the royalties

should be increased to at least 12% and designated for investments in the

affected communities.

Declare a moratorium on new mining permits until the Mining Law has been

made congruent with all Guatemalan international commitments, especially

Convention 169 of the ILO.

We believe that the Frente has legitimate reason to be concerned about

open

pit mining given the experience of people in other countries around the world.

\* The process will use as much as 250,000 litres of water per hour (according to the company's estimates) in a zone with limited water resources.

\* Open pit mining is highly destructive of the environment, with contamination of the water with heavy metals, which has negative repercussions for the health of the people and animals, and contamination of the fruits and vegetables being irrigated, both in the immediate area and in communities downstream.

\* It is almost inevitable that the cyanide used to leach the gold from the ore will leak into the environment.

\* Metal mining in developing countries creates conflict, encourages corruption, and often leads to violence.

\* The number of jobs directly related to mining do not compensate for the loss of agricultural jobs and the environmental, cultural and, especially, social deterioration that affect communities where there are mining projects.

A recent study has shown the presence of arsenic above the accepted limits in a similar mine in Honduras. Moreover, mining companies rarely budget enough for clean up and restoration after the mine is finished. This has been observed in developing countries as well as industrialized ones like Canada.

We understand that the Government of Guatemala's intention to attract mining companies is, among other things, to improve the economic situation of the poor. Unfortunately, this does not happen. According to the UN Conference on Trade and Development, poverty has deepened in mining-dependant countries in the last couple of decades. Not many jobs are created and they are short term, as in the case of the San Marcos' project, where the company forecasts only a 10-year long activity, after which the indigenous communities

will be  
left with the destruction and contamination of their environment.

Mr. President, we respect your commitment to "work, in a decisive and transparent way, for the benefit of all Guatemalans". We therefore request your immediate intervention. We, members of the international community, support the demands of the "Frente por la Vida" and will continue to monitor the developments of this case of a flagrant violation of indigenous rights.

Signing organizations:

The Social Justice Committee (Canada)  
Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (CCODP)  
Canadian Auto Workers (CAW-Canada)

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We are sending Father Ernie Schibli, a long time human rights worker, with great experience on Central America, specially Guatemala, to represent us and present this letter to the President of Guatemala. Ernie will participate in a press conference together with Monsignor Alvaro Ramazzini, the Bishop of San Marcos, the department where the mine is located. Bishop Ramazzini has been an advocate for the poor for many years and he has declared his opposition to open pit mines. Any organizations who sign the letter are invited to be part of this press conference, either directly or through a partner organization in Guatemala. The press conference will take place either in San Marcos or in Guatemala City, on a date between the 8 and the 10 of November.

Ernie hopes to visit the mining area of San Marcos, together with other NGO representatives and journalists. He will also be part of a meeting of the affected communities with the Guatemalan Congress Environmental Commission. There are other meetings that are being organized, including the premiere of a video on the mine in question.

We are asking you to sign on this letter and, if possible, send a financial contribution to cover the expenses of this campaign \*. Please make try to send your signatures by Monday November 1, Ernie is leaving on Tuesday November 2.

\* NB: We are very grateful to the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (CCODP) for their support.

For more information, please contact:  
Gloria Pereira-Papenburg  
The Social Justice Committee (Canada)  
(514) 933 9517 or (514) 933 6797 or toll free 1 877 933 6797  
gloria@s-j-c.net

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