

August 20, 2006

In July and August, Rights Action organized 2 educational-activist delegations to Guatemala, including 2-day visits to both the Mayan-Sipakapan communities, negatively affected by Glamis Gold, and the Mayan-Q'eqchi' communities, negatively affected by Skye Resources [formerly INCO nickel company]. Our 1st delegation attended one of the community consultations in Colotenango, Huehuetenango [referred to below], that were also supported by Rights Action.

BELOW:

- a summary of The Robust Oak publication, from San Marcos, Guatemala, addressing the recent community consultations against mining in Huehuetenango and irregularities with Skye Resources' environmental study and license
- an article about a mining company funded and staged a pro-mining march

Please re-produce far and wide. To get involved in work to support community controlled development, and hold mining companies accountable for harms and violations caused by mining, contact: info@rightsaction.org, 860-325-2152.

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THE ROBUST OAK, from San Marcos, Guatemala, No. 3, August 8th 2006

This e-newsletter communicates information regarding open-pit mining activities in Guatemala, as well as the resistance of local communities against it. The bulletin is called 'The Robust Oak' because, for the communities of San Marcos, this tree represents strength and great power to resist. Any comments or suggestions will be appreciated. The Robust Oak is a publication of the San Marcos Diocesan Commission that accompanies communities in resistance against mining / Movement of Campesino Workers (MTC), sander.mtc@gmail.com.

1. FIVE MUNICIPALITIES IN HUEHUETENANGO HOLD FORMAL CONSULTATIONS AND REJECT MINING

On the 25th and 27th of July inhabitants of the villages of Colotenango, San Juan Atit'án, Todos Santos Cuchumatanes, Santiago Chimaltenango y Concepción Huista, all in the province of Huehuetenango, had the opportunity to voice their opinion about potential future mining activities in their region. According to information provided by the organisation CEIBA (Friends of the Earth Guatemala), some 29,250 persons attended the community consultations. The voting's outcome was the total rejection of mining exploration and

exploitation within the municipal borders of these villages.

The procedures taken in each of the five villages to assure the legitimacy of the consultations started off by having the leaders of the Community Assemblies present a petition to the Municipal Councils. The Councils then emitted the respective municipal agreements, each defining the date and specific procedures of the community consultations. The actual referenda were supervised by a Community Assembly made up of vice majors, representatives of the community development councils (Cocodes), indigenous leaders, as well as national and international observers. Voting was effected by the show of hands, according to the customs of the indigenous people of this region (as you can see on the pictures above).

As the Diocesan Mining Commission from San Marcos we are very happy about the extraordinary participation of the indigenous peoples of Huehuetenango in the consultations, as well as their outcome. We would like to congratulate the persons and communities involved with the organisation of the consultations for their strength and courage.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the little attention paid to the consultations by the majority of the media, which once again shows their lack of respect for the indigenous people, who are firmly opposing the megaprojects imposed on them by the oligarchic government of Guatemala.

2. IRREGULARITIES IN GRANTING MINING LICENSES IN IZABAL

On the 2nd of August the Ministries of Energy and Mines (MEM) and Environment (MARN) announced that they had not changed opinion regarding the exploitation-license they granted the Guatemalan Nickel Company (CGN; property of Skye Resources Inc. from Canada) last April. This foreign company intends to extract nickel, iron, chrome and magnesium from the mountains around El Estor, in the province of Izabal. It is a highly surprising stance by the authorities given that the MARN disapproved the environmental impact assessment for Project Fenix's processing plant last February 2006.

We were informed about the current ministerial stance a few days after finding out that the Congressional Commission on Energy and Mines also disapproved CGN's environmental impact assessment (EIA) and asked the government to cancel their exploitation-license. According to Julio Morales, the president of this Commission, the two Ministries have acted against the law for having granted this mining license without the authorisation of the EIA. The stance of the Congressional Commission unquestionably acknowledges the preoccupations presented for a very long time by K'eqchi communities and local organisations like AEPDI, ASALI and Madre Selva.

As the Diocesan Mining Commission from San Marcos we are asking

ourselves the following question: if the revision of an environmental impact assessment states that mineral extraction is not recommended, but nevertheless a licence is granted, then what is the use of elaborating an EIA in the first place? And what is the use of having governmental staff examine these environmental assessments for months if, in the end, it won't make a difference anyway?

According to the latest information, members of the Congressional Commission on Energy and Mines will ask Lu s Ortiz, Minister of Energy and Mines, and Mario Dary, Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, for explanations regarding the matter sometime during this week.

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[translated for Rights Action by Rosalind Gill]

NOTE FROM Ajchmol, San Marcos, Guatemala: MINING EMPLOYEES FORCED TO PARTICIPATE IN DEMONSTRATION

On Wednesday night at 11 PM, twelve buses filled with Glamis Gold's Marlin Project employees set out for Guatemala City to participate in a demonstration supporting Glamis Gold's mining operations in San Miguel.

According to families living near the site of the mining operations, those who did not support the demonstration were told they would be fired.

Newspaper article: EMPLOYEES DEMONSTRATE IN SUPPORT OF MINING / COMPANY PROVIDES TRANSPORT TO GUATEMALA CITY, by Jessica Osorio

Yesterday, workers from various mines in the country demonstrated their support for mining in a march that ended at the Plaza de la Constitution in Guatemala City. Workers from mines located in Izabal and Alta Verapaz marched in the historic city centre to demand support from authorities to keep their jobs in the mining industry.

Over a thousand employees, declaring themselves to be members of the Miners'

Union and the Association for Mining Development in Guatemala (Asodemi), assembled at 9AM in Zone 2 of the capital. Hugo Yalibat, the leader of the march, said the following: "We ask the government to pay attention to our requests, because we depend on the mines for a living." The miners stood in front of the Presidential Palace and chanted: "Miners too, are children of God". Jorge Luis Ivalos, of Asodemi, said the following: "For those of us who work in the mining industry, putting food on the table is a priority."

SUPPORT FROM THE MINING COMPANIES

Middle and upper management from the [Canadian Skye Resources Inc.,

formerly INCO nickel company] Guatemala Nickel Company (CGN) also attended the march.

CGN, which is involved in exploration in El Estor, Izabal, helped organize the demonstration. Regina de Cerezo, spokesperson for the CGN, said that they provided five airplanes and an equal number of buses to transport workers to the capital. However, demonstrators said that in fact, 11 airplanes and more than five buses had been utilized. De Cerezo added:

"Transport was provided to make it possible for employees to participate, because El Estor is six hours away and the road is very bad."

Some miners, who wish to remain anonymous for fear of losing their jobs, said: "They told us that they would close the mine if we did not participate in the demonstration."

Milton Saravia, General Manager of the [Glamis Gold] Montana Company, who is in charge of the Marlin mining project in San Marcos, said that because of the distance and the poor state of the roads, many company workers did not arrive in the capital until the end of the demonstration.

The demonstrators assembled at noon in front of the Presidential Palace.

Oscar Berger did not make an appearance but a petition was presented. The miners were received in Congress by members of the Executive and of the Energy Commission, who were also presented with the petition.

CRITICISM OF THE DEMONSTRATION

Magalī Rey Rosa, of the Madreselva Collective, declared that it is not extraction of lime and sand but rather open-pit mining that destroys the environment. She added: "We understand that people need work, but mining sacrifices the well-being of many people for a small number of precarious jobs." Eloida Mejīa, of the AsociaciŃn Amigos del Lago de Izabal, said:

"The demonstration was a show and the companies wasted a lot of money on it."

IN THE GUATEMALAN CONGRESS

Julio Morales, Chair of the Energy and Mining Commission, said that he would ask the Minister, Luis Ortiz, for clarification on the issue of granting of mining permits. Next week, Congress will receive the court report regarding temporary suspension of mining permits.

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WHAT TO DO?

CANADIANS:

- get informed about and get involved with the forth-coming "Toronto Roundtable discussions", September 12-14, 2006, Hotel Radisson Admiral - Harbourfront (249 Queen's Quay West). For more info: www.halifaxinitiative.org/index.php/Issues_CNCA. To get involved locally in Toronto, contact: -1- GlobalAware, 416 596 0138, 416 352 6160, www.GlobalAware.org, cooperative@GlobalAware.org, and -2- www.kairoscanada.org, Ian Thomson, 877 403 8933 x229, ithomson@kairoscanada.org.

- The #1 line of work in favour of global justice and equality is to fund and directly support local organizations so that they can continue to lead their own struggles in defense and promotion of development, the environment and human rights. Make tax-charitable donations to Rights Action in Canada and the U.S., to help support community-based organizations in countries where we work (Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Haiti, Chiapas (Mexico);

- Get involved in education and activism work in your home community concerning the negative impacts of global economic and military power abuse whose policies and actions are controlled by the "G8" governments, including Canada and the U.S. With respect to North American mining companies operating in Central America, North American citizens have little or no information about who are the investors in, and financial beneficiaries from mining. Much research and education needs to be done on this issue - anyone can do this research themselves;

- Consider establishing long-term "partnerships" between your community / organization with grassroots organizations / communities in these countries that are affected by the global economic and military policies and actions of the G8 countries;

- Consider coming to these countries on an educational-activist delegation;

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