

Rights Action – May 9, 2011  
Goldcorp Impunity Watch in Honduras

**THE REAL COST OF GOLD IN HONDURAS:  
GOLDCORP & HONDURAN REGIME COVER-UP BLOOD & URINE TESTING &  
POISONING AT “SAN MARTIN” MINE**

**BELOW:** Article by Karen Spring and Grahame Russell

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**THE REAL COST OF GOLD IN HONDURAS:  
GOLDCORP & HONDURAN REGIME COVER-UP BLOOD & URINE TESTING &  
POISONING AT “SAN MARTIN” MINE**

By Karen Spring and Grahame Russell, Rights Action, April 27, 2011

Going back to at least 2007, Goldcorp Inc. and the government of Honduras have known about and covered up information about blood poisoning and health problems caused by Goldcorp's open-pit, cyanide leaching “San Martin” mine in the Siria Valley, department of Francisco Morazan, central Honduras. This mine is operated by Goldcorp's subsidiary Entremares.

Even though Goldcorp suspended its mining operation there in 2008, villagers in numerous towns near the mine site suffer recurring health harms, even today. Local residents – as well as cows -- have died of health problems likely caused by the mine.

Had Goldcorp and the government of Honduras released the results of their 2007 blood and urine samples, and accepted responsibility to care for the health harms caused by the mine, villagers in the Siria Valley might have received appropriate medical attention. Instead, the results were covered up until now. Still, neither Goldcorp nor the government have accepted responsibility.



(14 year old Abel shows rashes that have recurred for years. Abel's blood, based on the just-released 2007 government studies, contains over twice the levels of blood-lead content for children recommended as safe by the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). From El Pedernal, a village near the Goldcorp mine, Abel started experiencing health harms as early as 2003 when he began losing chunks of hair. Photo: Karen Spring, Rights Action, April 2011)

For blood-lead levels lower than what was found in Abel's 2007 test results, the CDC recommends "required and frequent clinical evaluation, investigation and environmental recuperation". At these blood-lead levels, the CDC also recommends the "immediate removal [of the people infected] from the environment [causing the lead exposure]."



(Rosa Maria Cabrera, 4 años, is from El Pedernal. Her mother is very worried. "Look. This is again occurring. Look at her little face. You should see how she scratches, and more in the nighttime. The doctor tells us that for her to get better, we need to bathe her in water from elsewhere. But we are poor. Where can we can. We will die here for the contamination that Entremares has left us, ... and they say it will be like this for a long time. That God care for us." Photo: Siria Valley Committee, April 2011)

#### **BLOOD STUDIES DONE IN 2005-06**

Soon after Goldcorp began operating the San Martin mine in 2000 (then owned by Glamis Gold, bought out by Goldcorp in 2006), villagers in the Siria Valley began complaining about the effects of the mine on their health and water sources. Their truthful complaints were met with denials and/or silence from the government of Honduras and Goldcorp.

After years of community organization, protests and advocacy concerning the health and environmental harms, independent health experts first carried out blood and water tests in the mine affected communities of Siria Valley in 2005-06. These initial studies – that indeed found dangerously high levels of lead and arsenic (naturally occurring heavy metals released into the air and water in dangerous levels via the gold mining process) in people's blood - were discounted by Goldcorp and the Honduran authorities, claiming that they were not official studies.

#### **GOVERNMENT BLOOD & URINE STUDIES IN 2007**

As the increasingly obvious evidence of health and environmental harms mounted (hair loss, skin rashes, miscarriages in women and cows, dying cows, etc) and as pressure mounted from the Siria Valley Environmental Defense Committee (comprised of people from the mine-affected communities) and other human rights and non-government groups, the government of Honduras carried out its own study in August 2007, taking blood and urine samples from a random and representative sampling of 62 children and adults in communities near Goldcorp's "San Martin" mine. 'Experts' contracted by Goldcorp observed and were present during much of the blood and urine sampling process.

#### **COVER-UP BEGINS**

Upon completion, the government of Honduras did not release the results. Rather, the Ministry of Environment claimed a need to send the samples to 'experts' in Colombia, for further

verification. Again, 'experts' contracted by Goldcorp traveled to Colombia to 'accompany' the blood and urine samples verification process.

#### **FOUR YEARS OF SILENCE**

From that moment, until now, a silence has surrounded the results of those studies, despite constant demands from the mine-affected communities of the Siria Valley to get the results, despite continually recurring health problems documented by the Siria Valley Committee, Dr. Juan Almendares, Rights Action, CAFOD (Catholic Overseas Development Agency, UK), Development and Peace, and other investigators and groups.

On April 12, 2011, almost 4 years after the samples were taken, the 62 individuals (whose blood and urine were tested) began to receive the results of the levels of arsenic, mercury and lead detected in the blood tests in 2007. Notably, the results of studying the urine samples have still not been released.



(Community leaders and activists Carlos Amador and Roger Escobar, from the Siria Valley Committee, and Pedro Landa, from CEPRODEC (Center for the Promotion of Community Development), discuss the blood test results with some of the individuals that had tests done in 2007, and who are suffering on-going health harms today. At this time, Dr. Juan Almendares, along with the Siria Valley Committee and CEPRODEC, are doing a comprehensive analysis of all the findings. Photo: Karen Spring, Rights Action, April 2011)

#### **INITIAL FINDINGS**

What is known, in summary, is that of the 62 people sampled in 2007, 46 of them (27 children and 19 adults) have dangerously high levels of heavy metals poisoning in their blood that would have required immediate and sustained medical treatment back in 2007, let alone today.

Twenty-four of the children studied contain dangerously elevated lead levels in blood (10 ug/dl = 10 micrograms of lead/decilitre of blood), according to World Health Organization and CDC standards.

For a representative and random sampling of villagers, near Goldcorp's mine, these are extremely high percentages of villagers with indications of blood poisoning. The implications

for the local population at large would have been alarming in 2007, had they been advised. They are just as alarming now, as villagers living near the mine site have continued to be exposed to the water and environmental contamination that has never been acknowledged by Goldcorp and the government of Honduras, let alone remedied.

### **RE-CONFIRMING THE OBVIOUS**

The results confirm what the Siria Valley Committee and families in the affected communities, other Honduran and international organizations, independent scientists and doctors. See links, below, to articles.

### **GOLDCORP PARTICIPATES IN BLOOD & URINE SAMPLING PROCESS**

What also appears clear is that Goldcorp knew of and therefore – we believe - helped cover up the blood tests results. Goldcorp contracted a former Honduran Medical Examiner, Denis Castro Bobadilla, to observe the collection of the blood and urine samples in Siria Valley in 2007, along with a former Special Attorney of the Environment, Mario Chinchilla, also contracted by Goldcorp.

While Chinchilla previously worked as a prosecuting attorney with the Environment Ministry, criminal charges were laid against Goldcorp for various environmental crimes including stealing water, aggravated damages, disobedience of authority and destruction of the forest.

These are the same individuals who, paid by Goldcorp, also traveled to Colombia to 'accompany' the blood and urine testing process.

### **DEFICIENT 'CLOSURE' PLAN**

In 2008, Goldcorp halted operations at the San Martin mine, though many suspect that Goldcorp hopes to re-open and expand it, given that since the June 2009 military coup, the military-backed regime of Honduras is promoting unfettered "international investment". In its draft closure plan, Goldcorp makes no mention of, or provision for follow-up comprehensive medical and health support for the affected communities.

### **CAMPAIGN TO SILENCE SICK INDIVIDUALS**

In a further attempt to cover-up this information and silence Siria Valley villagers with health harms, the Honduran government - with the reported knowledge of Goldcorp – now is going door-to-door to the homes of the 62 individuals, asking them to sign what appear to be confidentiality and waiver papers, and offering to take them to the public hospital in Tegucigalpa to treat them, based on the test results and that heavy metals found in their blood almost four years ago.

To the health harmed people of Siria Valley, this is an obvious effort to undermine the on-going work of the Siria Valley Committee, CEPRODEC and Dr. Juan Almandares; it is an attempt to silence sick individuals and stop any possible legal repercussions in the future.

### **WHAT IS NEEDED**

More importantly, the people of the Siria Valley do not need medical treatment for just those 62 people whose blood and urine were sampled in 2007, though they do need that.

Needed is an acknowledgement by the government of Honduras and by Goldcorp that there are past and on-going health and environmental harms caused by Goldcorp's mining operation, and that Goldcorp and the government are responsible to do everything necessary to provide comprehensive treatment and compensation to all affected people and communities, and to repair the underlying environmental contaminations and harms.

Needed are all the health files – including complete results of the blood and urine tests – to be returned to the 62 individuals.

Needed is a comprehensive medical response to the widespread contaminants and health harms throughout the Siria Valley.

Needed is a comprehensive environmental assessment of the entire region, to test for on-going air, earth and water contaminations; followed by a comprehensive environmental rehabilitation program to make the region again safe for living.

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## WHAT TO DO

Send letters to Goldcorp, with copies to your media, to your own politician, to the Canada Pension Plan, and to your own pension fund (if it is invested in Goldcorp):

Why did Goldcorp not release this information 4 years ago?  
Why is Goldcorp not releasing this information now?  
Will Goldcorp accept responsibility for the health and environmental harms and provide full compensation and reparations as part of a necessary health attention program in the Siria Valley?  
Will Goldcorp include complete medical/health and environmental considerations & reparations measures in the closure plan?

### ADDRESSES

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## LINKS

August 2006 report by Sandra Cuffe, Rights Action, "Independent Study Reveals Dangerous Levels of Heavy Metal Contamination in Water and Blood Samples in the Communities Affected by Glamis Gold's Mining Activities in the Siria Valley":  
[http://rightsaction.org/articles/Honduras\\_blood\\_poisoning\\_0806.html](http://rightsaction.org/articles/Honduras_blood_poisoning_0806.html)

February 2007 IPS article, "Dangerous levels of lead and arsenic have been found in the blood of Honduran villagers living downstream from Goldcorp mine":  
[http://rightsaction.org/articles/IPS\\_health\\_&\\_environment\\_doc\\_070207.html](http://rightsaction.org/articles/IPS_health_&_environment_doc_070207.html)

March 2007 article by Dawn Paley, "Gold, Skin and Bones: Goldcorp's Adventure in Honduras": [http://rightsaction.org/articles/canadian\\_mining\\_honduras\\_052307.html](http://rightsaction.org/articles/canadian_mining_honduras_052307.html)

September 2007 report, by Rights Action, "Honduran government fines Goldcorp for water contamination": [http://rightsaction.org/articles/Goldcorp\\_seeks\\_contamination\\_091707.html](http://rightsaction.org/articles/Goldcorp_seeks_contamination_091707.html)

January 2008 article in revsitazo.com, "Lead, Mercury, Arsenic Found in Siria Valley Population" by Goldcorp mine:  
[http://rightsaction.org/articles/goldcorp\\_siria\\_valley\\_012508.html](http://rightsaction.org/articles/goldcorp_siria_valley_012508.html)

April 2009 photo-essay by Siria Valley Committee & Rights Action, "Gold mining and health harms in Honduras": [http://rightsaction.org/articles/photo\\_Honduras\\_mining\\_harms.html](http://rightsaction.org/articles/photo_Honduras_mining_harms.html)

December 2009 report by CAFOD & Development and Peace, "Evidence of Severe Water Contamination at Goldcorp Mine": <http://www.cafod.org.uk/resources/policy/private-sector/unearth-justice>

April 2010 photo-essay by Siria Valley Committee & Rights Action, "On-going health harms in Honduras, near Goldcorp's mine":  
[http://rightsaction.org/Alerts/Honduras\\_Goldcorp\\_health\\_harms\\_032910.html](http://rightsaction.org/Alerts/Honduras_Goldcorp_health_harms_032910.html)

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## **WHAT TO DO**

### **GOLDCORP Annual Shareholder Meeting, May 18, 2011, Vancouver, Education and Activism**

To get involved: [miningjustice@gmail.com](mailto:miningjustice@gmail.com), <http://goldcorpoutofguatemala.com/>

### **DELEGATION to Guatemala (JULY 3-10, 2011)**

"ELECTIONS; NO DEMOCRACY"

Join a Rights Action delegation to Guatemala from July 3 to 10, 2011. This pre-elections delegation will speak with human rights and social movement organizations struggling to create conditions for truly democratic processes, and limit the control organized crime and big business hold over the state through illegal networks of influence.

INFORMATION: Annie Bird; (202) 680-3002, [annie@rightsaction.org](mailto:annie@rightsaction.org)

## **DONATE FUNDS**

Since 1995, Rights Action has been funding the community development, environmental justice and human rights defense work of community based organizations in Guatemala and Honduras.

TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS: Make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

- UNITED STATES: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887
  - CANADA: 552 - 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8
- CREDIT-CARD DONATIONS: <http://rightsaction.org/contributions.htm>

## **MORE INFORMATION**

[info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org)

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