

Rights Action – January 22, 2012

MINING COMPANIES GEARING UP IN HONDURAS

As Killings, Repression and Impunity Continue Unchecked in the ‘Murder Capital’ of the World

letter written on behalf of Honduran organizations

Even as Honduras is now known as the ‘murder capital’ of the world, even as Honduras is known as one of the ‘journalist-killing capitals’ of the world, and even as it has become a ‘LGBT repression and killing capital’ as well, the Congress in Honduras (the same Congress that rubber-stamped the illegal and violent 2009 military coup) is aiming to pass a new Mining Law. The global (mainly Canadian) mining industry is waiting to rush in.

“INVESTORS ARE PRESSURING A LOT”

In a letter written on behalf of Honduran organizations, including the Siria Valley Environmental Committee that since 2000 has been suffering and denouncing environmental and health harms caused by Goldcorp Inc’s cyanide-leaching, open-pit/ mountain-top removal mine in the Siria Valley, Pedro Landa (pedro_landa@hotmail.com) writes:

“The National Congress of Honduras is preparing to pass a new mining law in the coming weeks which will reopen the processes of concession and operation of more than 300 mining projects. In spite of the efforts of Honduran organizations, the Congressional commission on mining issues has closed the door to citizen participation. In a meeting, the president of the congressional commission argued that “Investors are pressuring a lot”. ...

“After going over the new proposal, we found that many of our suggestions, particularly the most important ones (such as the obligatory and binding nature of prior consultation, the prohibition of open pit mining and the use of toxic substances like cyanide and mercury, the possibility of broadening the mining exclusion zones and a legal typifying of environmental crimes) have been left out and Congress is not willing to advance in consensus building with social organizations.” (Translation: Proyecto de Acompañamiento Internacional en Honduras, <http://friendshipamericas.org/honduras>)

KILLINGS CONTINUE

On January 17, 2012, José Ricardo Rosales, a 38 year old lawyer, was killed in the northern city of Tela, soon after reporting to the El Tiempo newspaper that police were torturing detainees in Tela. Rosales was shot by three hooded gunman near his home in the San José neighborhood. According to the La Prensa newspaper, 74 lawyers have been killed in Honduras since the June 2009 military coup.

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/greenslade/2012/jan/20/press-freedom-honduras>)

Wilfredo Paz, of the Permanent International Human Rights Observatory of Aguan, denounced the January 20, 2012 killing of campesino leader Matias Valle, a member of the La Chile cooperative which is a member of MUCA (Unified Campesino Movement of Aguan). "Valle was shot by two people riding on a motorcycle as he waited in front of the Vargas store in the community Quebrada de Arena in the municipality of Tocoa, Colon."

MINING AND THE MILITARY COUP AGAINST PRESIDENT ZELAYA

There are a number of nefaste reasons why the democratically elected government of Honduras was ousted in the June 28, 2009 military coup. One factor was that the government declared, in 2008, a moratorium on the handing out of any more mining concessions, recognizing that the Supreme Court found that some 13 articles of the previous (pro-industry) Mining Law to be unconstitutional, recognizing that great environmental and health harms suffered by villagers from the Siria Valley, in and around Goldcorp Inc's cyanide leaching, mountain-top removal/ open pit mine.

"BUSINESS AS USUAL" WILL CONTRIBUTE TO MORE STATE REPRESSION AND VIOLENCE IN HONDURAS

Now, the military-supported and quite illegitimate regime in Honduras wants to re-open the gates to mining. Consider sending the letter below, written by Honduran organizations, to the list Honduran officials. And, importantly, send this information to your own elected politicians in Canada and the USA. Since the June 2009 military coup, the governments of the USA and Canada are the governments that have most supported and legitimized the post-coup, repressive regimes of Honduras.

Global companies and investors must no be allowed to profit and benefit from the fact that there is no end in sight to the State repression, violence and impunity. No more business and politics as usual.

SEND THIS LETTER TO:

ABOGADO JUAN ORLANDO HERNANDEZ
Presidente del Congreso Nacional de la Republica de Honduras
Barrio el Centro, Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Mr. President:

As an international organization committed to the development and wellbeing of the peoples, particularly in the case of the Honduran people, we are aware that many social organizations in your country have made extensive efforts to promote a Mining Law that guarantees the protection and full respect for human rights, contemplates greater and better controls over mining activities and above all, that respects the will of the Honduran people, expressed by the communities that suffer the impact of mining activity.

We are well aware of the vast pressure on the governments of countries like Honduras, which come from mining corporations and their States, in order to ensure judicial frameworks that are favorable to their investments and that put aside the supreme reasons of national states which is that of protecting the wellbeing of its citizens.

We sadly acknowledge that the weakening of these judicial principles has meant environmental degradation, contamination of water resources, aggravated damage of people's health, debilitating systems for control and monitoring, among others, all of which open the possibilities to fuel corruption and influence peddling.

We are respectful of the right that countries have, to use their natural resources for social development, prioritizing the protection of human beings and the environment, in keeping with the right that every human being has to having a healthy environment.

Noting the serious consequences that mining activity has in human beings and the environment, concerned about the levels of violence that prevail in Honduras, and aware that the National Congress is soon to pass a new Mining Law that has not been coordinated with the citizens of the country, we would like to respectfully request that you provide the necessary spaces for dialogue and consensus, before passing the law, so it does not trigger greater social conflict, as occurs in other Latin American countries.

Considering the efforts made by citizens to re-establish democracy and the rule of law in Honduras, we trust that you will make the wise decision to promote an all inclusive dialogue in order to reach consensus on a legal document that contributes to the process recovering the trust that citizens have in those who govern them.

Respectfully,

Signature, Home town, County

President of Congress: juanorlandofernandez@yahoo.com,
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José Alfredo Saavedra: Leader of the Partido Liberal: joseasaavedra@congreso.gob.hn

Celin Discua Elvir: Leader of the partido nacional: jdiscua@congreso.gob.hn

Augusto Cruz Ascencio: Leader of the Partido Demócrata Cristiano: augustocruz@congreso.gob.hn

SEND A COPY to your own Senator, Member of Congress, Member of Parliament.

DELEGATION TO GUATEMALA, MARCH 10-17, 2012

"DAMS, MINING & AFRICAN PALM PRODUCTION - versus - COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE & HUMAN RIGHTS"

Lead by Grahame Russell (Rights Action co-director). Information:
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Since 1995, Rights Action has been funding and working to eliminate the underlying causes of poverty, environmental destruction, repression, racism and impunity in Guatemala and Honduras, as well as in Chiapas (Mexico) and El Salvador. The Canadian Rights Action Foundation, founded in 1999, is independent from and works in conjunction with Rights Action (USA) that was founded originally in 1983. Since 1995, Grahame Russell and Annie Bird have been co-directors of Rights Action; Grahame is founder and director of Rights Action (Canada).

TO MAKE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS

for indigenous and campesino organizations working for community-controlled development, environmental justice, human rights & justice in Guatemala & Honduras (and also in Chiapas & el Salvador), 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

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EDUCATIONAL DELEGATIONS TO GUATEMALA & HONDURAS: Form your own group or join one of our delegations to learn first hand about community development, human rights and environmental struggles

NEWS:

www.democracynow.org / <http://therealnews.com/t2/> /
www.upsidedownworld.org / www.dominionpaper.ca

BOOKS:

Eduardo Galeano's "Open Veins of Latin America"

Howard Zinn's "A People's History of the United States"

James Loewen's "Lies My Teacher Told Me"

Naomi Klein's "The Shock Doctrine"

Paolo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed"

Dr Seuss's "Horton Hears A Who"

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