

Rights Action
June 16, 2012

Letter Of Apology To Yoli Oqueli, from Canada to Guatemala

By Emilie Smith

NOTE:

On June 13, 2012, community leader Yolanda Oqueli Veliz was ambushed and shot by unknown assailants on a motorcycle, as she was leaving the peaceful blockade to the entrance of the proposed site of the Tambor gold mine (owned by Radius Gold), 28 kilometres northeast of Guatemala City. Three days later, she is in stable condition, in hospital, one bullet still lodged in her body.

The blockade has been maintained for weeks by inhabitants of two affected communities, San José del Golfo and San Pedro Ayumpac, who are protesting that – contrary to national and international law – no public consultation had taken place before the Guatemalan government gave the go ahead for the gold and silver mine on February 27th.

The mine is 100% owned by Canadian company, Radius Gold, Inc., based in Vancouver, B.C.

In May 2012, Emilie joined a University of Northern British Columbia / Rights Action delegation in Guatemala, and visited with Yolanda Oqueli and other community members on Saturday May 26th.

[From: Emilie Smith, emilietsmith@gmail.com]

LETTER OF APOLOGY TO YOLI OQUELI

June 15, 2012

Dear Yoli,

I have no words in my heart or mouth that could possibly express my outrage and grief over what has happened. The harm to your precious sacred person is vile and inexcusable. The intended harm to your soul, your spirit, your struggle, and the struggle of all those, who like you, are in love with the Earth – fertile, living dirt, and her lifeblood running water - is beyond comprehension. All those, around the world, who love life fiercely are horrified and shattered – and furious. How dare any one, whoever they may be, feel themselves so full of righteousness and power, that they would act in

such a cowardly fashion! But in the end, those who carried the pistols, are not the ones responsible for this hideous attack on your life. I am.

Never have I felt more ashamed to be a Canadian.



(May 26, 2012, Yolanda Oqueli Veliz addresses the Archbishop of Guatemala, who visited the peaceful community blockade that day. Photo, James Rodriquez, a photo-journalist who traveled there with the Rights Action/UNBC delegation, james@mimundo.org)

In my Christian religion there are two kinds of sin: sins of commission and sins of omission. The former are things that we do consciously and actively to harm God's good creation. The latter sins are the harm we do, by doing nothing. Most Canadians, undoubtedly, wouldn't in their wildest dreams have picked up a gun to hurt you. But every last one of us, is collectively responsible for what happens in our name, and all of us benefit financially from our church, union and even national Canadian Pension Plans' investment in Canadian mining companies around the world, in Guatemala, and in your corner of the earth, San José del Golfo.

For this, I am profoundly ashamed, and indescribably sorry.

Neither is not knowing an excuse. Every one of us, as we quietly remove the Canadian flags sewn onto our backpacks, and pocket those little pins they give us on Canada Day, should know by now: around the world, in our name, and to our financial benefit, Canadian mining companies are destroying the earth. Chasing after the love of gold and money, they care not for communities, the land, the water, or due process of consultation, or the fair

sharing of profits. They come, blow the earth up, suck up the water, leaving cesspools of poison behind. And promising trinkets, 'development' and jobs to the desperately poor and starving, they divide households and communities, leaving bloodshed and fear in their wake.

And then without a speck of dirt under their fingernails, satisfied that they have done some good for the poor in the world, helped out their moms and their pops back in Canada, retire to their clubs and their pools to relax after a hard day's work.

You asked me to pray for you, Yoli, that day we spent with you at the blockade. You asked me once and again, with some fear, urgency and perhaps with a sense of what could happen. And you brought us broth with rice, and tortillas, and crackers. We were hungry, and it was good to eat at your table. Thank you for all you gave to us that day, and all that you taught us about the value of the earth, and all of the precious men, women and children, sleeping on the highway to protect their holy hill.



(May 26, 2012, Emilie Smith, Canadian Anglican priest living in Guatemala, addresses community members. Photo, James Rodriguez, james@mimundo.org)

I promised to pray Yoli, and I have, and I will. I pray for your recovery, and return to full health, of body, mind and spirit. I pray for your family. I pray for all those still on the peaceful blockade. I pray for those who carried the guns, and shot them. May they have a turn in their hearts, and be sorry, and learn to love the true God of Life.

I pray for the desperately ill, those mining men and women, who have become so terribly confused, and have aligned themselves with the false god of money, and have betrayed their own most sacred nature.

“Come now you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. Your riches have rotted . . .your gold and silver have rusted and their rust will be evidence against you . . .” Letter of James 5:1

Yoli, as you lie in your hospital bed, may the unknowable mystery of the healing God of Love, work Her miracle, to reknit your damaged body, and may all those who love you, gain courage and strength from your faithful witness, as we walk together on this journey.

With Love,
Emilie

(The Reverend) Emilie Smith, is priest in the Anglican Church of Canada, and Co-President of the Oscar Romero International Christian Network in Solidarity with the Peoples of Latin America (SICSAL).

WHAT TO DO - HUMANITARIAN-EMERGENCY RELIEF

Please make financial contributions (tax-deductible in Canada and USA) for the medical costs and family and community needs of Yolanda Oqueli Veliz. Rights Action has already been sending general support funds to the communities of San Jose del Golfo and San Pedro Ayumpac that are working for integral community development and the environment. 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 can be made (anonymously):

www.rightsaction.org

- Canada:
<https://www.canadahelps.org/DonationDetails.aspx?cookieCheck=true>
- USA:
<https://npo.networkforgood.org/Donate/Donate.aspx?npoSubscriptionId=488>

DONATIONS OF STOCK can be made (anonymously): info@rightsaction.org

WHAT TO DO - WRITE & KEEP ON, KEEP ON WRITING

Please send your own letters, with copies of this information, to Radius Gold, to your own elected politicians and government officials, and to your local media. This on-going mining related repression is profoundly a “Canadian” and “North American” problem.

Mining related repression will not stop ... until Canadians and Americans hold our governments, our pension funds and private investments, our companies and investors fully accountable for profiting from the relentless expansion of our companies and investors around the globe, directly and indirectly causing and then turning a blind eye to repression, forced evictions, environmental harms, etc.

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<http://www.radiusgold.com/s/JV-Guatemala.asp?ReportID=414154&>

PHOTO-ESSAY BY JAMES RODRIGUEZ (www.mimundo.org):

There has been a serious incident last night involving Ms. Yolanda “Yoli” Oquely Veliz. Unknown assailants shot Yoli, a known local leader, last night. She is currently in serious but stable condition. Please read and share the following communiqué widely:

<http://www.mimundo.org/2012/06/14/2012-06-guatemalan-female-activist-shot-for-leading-blockade-against-a-canadian-owned-gold-mine/>

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