

Rights Action
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Another murder near 'La Puya' linked to American/Canadian mining companies

By Alex Pedersen

Repression Linked To North American Mining Companies Doesn't Just Happen – It Is Policy

Over the past few years, in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador alone, there have been multiples murders, numerous armed attacks, gang-rapes, and other acts of repression against local citizens, all linked to Canadian/American mining companies: Hudbay Minerals, Goldcorp Inc, Pacific Rim, Tahoe Resources, Radius Gold, KCA Associates,

This repression and violence is guaranteed to continue, until North American citizens bring enough pressure to bear on our governments, media, companies and investors, to begin to hold them legally and morally accountable for these harms and violations.

WHAT TO DO: see below.

Guatemala: La Puya's Celebration Of Life, Peace, And Defense Of The Earth

by Alexandra Pedersen, 15 July 2013

<http://upside-downworld.org/main/guatemala-archives-33/4377-guatemala-la-puyas-celebration-of-life-peace-and-defense-of-the-earth>

On the same day that Guatemalan President Otto Pérez Molina announced a two-year moratorium on mining, human rights and environmental activist Santos Fidel Ajau Suret was gunned down after leaving the peaceful community roadblock known as La Puya. He was a 54-year-old community activist resisting the El Tambor mine.

Since March of 2012, Guatemalan community members from the municipalities of San José del Golfo and San Pedro Ayampuc have demanded the cancellation of the American mining company Kappes Cassidy and Associates' (KCA's) exploitation license in the Tambor mountain region (originally owned and operated by Canadian mining company Radius Gold Inc.).

Over the past 16 months, participants of the community roadblock have endured often violent and systematic repression organized by the mining company, pro-mining community members and the government.

Memorably, on June 13, 2012, activist and community leader Yolanda Oqueli Veliz was shot in an assassination attempt while leaving La Puya. As an act of intimidation, her house was sprayed with bullets on July 9, 2013, the same day as Ajau Suret was assassinated by two armed motorcyclists.

Despite these efforts to destabilize resistance efforts, La Puya remains strong and continues to blockade the main entrance of the El Tambor mine.

On Sunday, in a celebration of life, peace and defense of the earth, community members from La Puya joined together beside the central market of San José del Golfo in support of the peaceful struggle for dignity, water and future generations. This gathering was organized shortly after a press release denouncing the murder of Ajau Suret and the intimidation of Oqueli Veliz.

Community members young and old, non-government organizations, activists, musicians and students mobilized in support of this anti-mining struggle. Presenters chanted "Si a la vida, no a la minería!" and their voices were answered in unison throughout the crowd. Following speeches from community leaders and supporters, a video update on the dialogue with the Guatemalan government was screened.

Ten representatives from La Puya were invited to dialogue with President Pérez Molina at the Presidential Palace on July 12 to address the community's opposition to the mining project of El Tambor. Neither KCA nor the original Canadian company Radius Gold Inc. properly consulted with communities surrounding the proposed mine site.

Two months following Oqueli Veliz's shooting in 2012, Radius Gold Inc. sold the mine to KCA, citing it as a "problematic asset" to investors.

Despite the mining company, its supporters and the government's use of threats, assassination attempts, arrests, harassment and further intimidation tactics against them, members of La Puya have continued their resistance nonviolently over the last 16 months. In fact, their only reaction to physical violence has been to link arms and sing hymns and to demand their rights through diplomatic means.

The only "problem" is the company's lack of accountability, consultation, and respect for human life and the environment. While the July 12th meeting was a

step towards opening dialogue between the Guatemalan government and the community, a positive outcome remains to be seen and is unlikely.

President Pérez Molina's two-year moratorium on mining will not alter the present situation at La Puya. The extractive license for the El Tambor mine site is already approved and KCA has been applying pressure to the government, along with pro-mining community members, to disband the peaceful community resistance.

Community members resisting the mine demand the cancellation of the license. Further steps towards dialogue are being taken while community members maintain the peaceful roadblock at La Puya.

Community divisions are rampant as a result of tactics employed by both Radius Gold and now KCA. The mine has yet to open, yet the social impacts as a result of irresponsible mining practices have already irreparably damaged this area of Guatemala. However, community members who have joined together to form the resistance at La Puya have strengthened their community resistance based on the respect for water and life.

The two municipalities lie in the dry corridor of Guatemala, just 30-minutes northeast of Guatemala City. Community members explain that they often only receive water once or twice a week, and usually only for one to two hours each day. Yet the mining company has not made clear how much water it will need for the extraction process or what water source it will exploit for this. Furthermore, members of La Puya are also distressed over pre-existing levels of arsenic in the local water supply.

“We have to keep going” says one La Puya participant. The latest round of repression has brought community members closer together in an effort to continue their struggle for life, dignity and water with peaceful means against repressive forces that mean to do them harm.

Community members of La Puya and national and transnational solidarity organizations demand an investigation into the murder of Santos Fidel Ajau Suret, the intimidation tactics used against Yolanda Oqueli Veliz, and for the cancellation of the mineral license of a company that has supported criminal acts against the Guatemalan population.

WRITE TO YOUR OWN ELECTED OFFICIAL

This relentless and violent push for mining expansion – and the repression associated with it - is coming from Canada and the U.S., not from

Guatemala. All the fundamental decisions are being taken by North American companies, investors and governments. The vast majority of any profits flow to the companies, shareholders and investors, while all the environmental and health harms, repression and other human rights violations occur against the local populations in Guatemala.

This will only be slowed down, or curtailed when Canadians and Americans successfully hold their governments, companies and investors to account.

Write your own letters, and send copies of this information, to your own elected politicians (MPs, Congresspersons, Senators) - and to other government officials, your local media, etc. – to remind them that this state of repression, threat and impunity are substantially our problems, and that it simply will not end until Canadian and American politicians and officials take concrete diplomatic, political and legal steps to put an end to the repression linked to the unwanted and often-times violent expansion of Canadian and American mining company operations in Guatemala. ... And then keep on writing your elected politicians, again and again. They work for us. They have to respond to us.

CONTACT:

- MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT:
<http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Parlinfo/Compilations/HouseOfCommons/MemberByPostalCode.aspx?Menu=HOC>
- CONGRESS: <http://www.house.gov/> to get info for your member of Congress, and call: 202-224-3121
- SENATE: <http://www.senate.gov/> to get contact for your Senator, and call: 202-224-3121

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