

Goldcorp's Endless Gold Fever in Guatemala Creating Endless Divisions And Harms

By Grahame Russell, Guatemala, September 18, 2013

As the film Gold Fever is being screened around the world (more information below), I again visited some of the Mayan Mam communities in San Miguel Ixtahuacan (San Marcos, Guatemala) directly suffering the harms and violations caused by Goldcorp Inc's cyanide-leaching, mountain-top removal "Marlin" mine.



(All photos @ Grahame Russell)

On September 16, 2013, Diodora Hernandez (featured in Gold Fever) and her daughter Maria greet us as we hike onto their plot of land by the mine. In July 2010, two men employed at the mine tried to assassinate Diodora because she refused to sell her land to Goldcorp's Guatemalan subsidiary. The bullet entered her right eye and exited by her right ear. Miraculously she survived ... and refuses to sell her land today.

Though it is known who tried to kill her, and Goldcorp acknowledged the two men worked in its mine (still do?), no justice has been done for this typical, brutal case of mining-related repression.

Recently, Santos Ruiz, president of Diodora's village COCODE (Community Development Committee), showed up at the local school where her grand-daughter Olga had just entered grade one, pressuring the school to kick Olga out. Santos Ruiz has worked in the mine for years. While there have been no more attempts on her life, people employed at the mine continue to try and make Diodora's life hell.



At her property's edge, Diodora stands with Carmen Mejia and Javier de Leon of ADIMSI, the Association for Integral Development of San Miguel Ixtahuacan. (Carmen and Javier are featured in Gold Fever). Goldcorp bought the neighbor's land and the process of deforestation has begun. Javier's foot rests on the trunk of one of many trees already cut.

Ever Expanding Open Pits And Tunnels

In 2008, Lisa Wade, Goldcorp's director of environment in Guatemala, told Nate Einbinder (visiting the mine with a University of Northern British Columbia educational seminar): "We have hopes for an endless mine" (<http://upsidedownworld.org/main/guatemala-archives-33/1421-guatemala-the-hope-for-an-endless-mine>).

In 2013, Lisa Wade's words appear true. Though Goldcorp's current license apparently ends in 2018, there are no signs they will stop mining. Goldcorp continues to buy as much land as they can pressure people to sell. Then they clear-cut the forests and use dynamite to blow up new mountain ridges. At the same time, they are expanding their network of tunnels.



A few years ago, Goldcorp clear-cut the forest at this 'Los Coches' pit and then used explosives to blow up and remove the mountain, layer by layer. This mountain-top removal technique is used, generally, when the gold is minutely dispersed in the earth and rock. The entire mountain of rocks and earth, blown up and crushed, is then processed in Goldcorp's plant, half a mile down the mountain, using cyanide and other chemicals to separate the gold from all other minerals.

Here also is an entry point to one of the tunnels. Generally, companies use the tunneling technique when they are following a concentrated vein of the mineral they are digging for.



Carmen and Javier stand on the ridge above the Los Coches pit as a dump truck enters the tunnel. The long orange tube ventilates the system of tunnels.



Down the mountain ridge from the entry to the Los Coches tunnel, we pass one of the “respiradoras” – a sort of huge chimney / exhaust tunnel, over 6 feet in diameter, that releases exhaust of contaminated airs from the tunnel far underground.

Since the Marlin mine began operations in 2005, there has been no end to the environmental and health harms and human rights violations that much of the local Mayan Man population are suffering, as they watch their mountain ridges destroyed around them, as they feel the ground and their homes shake due to the explosives used to open pits or dig tunnels.



Further down the ridge from the Los Coches pit and tunnel entrance, we visited Modesta in her home. Every one of her neighbors has sold their land to Goldcorp. Hemmed in all sides, they will not sell. “Where would we go?” Modesta and her husband Rumaldo tell stories of neighbors and cousins who did sell, and are now living in other people’s homes, working as day labourers because they could not afford to buy land elsewhere and start their farming lives over.



Rumaldo explains that since 3 months ago they hear and feel the use of underground explosives, twice a day – around 6am and 6pm. It is almost certainly that the explosions are going off in the Los Coches tunnel that passes somewhere under their land, ... though this information is never made public.

No Justice, No Remedy, No End In Sight

Since 2004, local groups – ADISMI and FREDMI, amongst others – along with national and international solidarity and human rights groups have documented and denounced a long list of environmental and health harms and other human rights violations. (For background information: info@rightsaction.org; see “Gold Fever” film – information below.)

Goldcorp – forever supported by the governments of Guatemala and Canada – denies everything, while making profits as much as 10 times higher than their initial economic feasibility studies in the late 1990s, due to high price of gold.

There is simply no way to hold Goldcorp legally to account in Guatemalan or Canadian courts. They know it, the governments of Canada and Guatemala know it, the victims of the harms and violations know it, everyone knows it. They act with complete impunity.

The one (very important) decision of the IACHR (Inter-American Commission of Human Rights) in 2010, ordering the government of Guatemala to suspend Goldcorp’s mining operation due to the credible allegations of environmental and health harms, was undermined (pun intended) when the IACHR (and its parent body, the Organization of American States) caved in to political and economic influences of the governments of Guatemala and Canada and of Goldcorp itself, and overturned its own suspension order in 2011.



In the community of Siete Platos, Miguel Angel stands in front of his home, pointing at a spot where one of the high caliber bullets hit, when there was an attempt on his life in 2010. Miguel Angel and the Siete Platos community have been struggling to pressure the government of Guatemala and Goldcorp to provide the community with potable water, as ordered by the IACHR, as their water sources have been contaminated and depleted due to the mine operation. Goldcorp and the government refuse to even do this.

One poster reads: *"I am Mam and I take care of my territory because where there is mining there are contaminated rivers. Scientific studies done by COPAE (Peace and Ecology Commission) have proven that the Quivichil and Tzala rivers are contaminated with high levels of heavy metals and it is harmful to use the water."*

The next poster reads: *"When gold speaks, the truth is silenced. Politicians respond to the interests of the mining companies. No one speaks of the health risks or of conflicts related to water. The government does not abide by the rulings of the Inter-American commission of Human Rights."*

Not only was Miguel Angel shot at in 2010, but in 2011, along with dozens of community members who were participating in a peaceful protest, Miguel Angel was beaten by gun-bearing men in favour of the mine. They had been protesting for the government of Guatemala to abide by the ruling of the IACHR and suspend the mining operation ... which did not happen.

Arrange A Screening Of "Gold Fever"

Winner of the "Rigoberta Menchú Grand Prix" at the Montréal First Peoples Festival, Gold Fever addresses the environmental destruction and health harms, human rights violations and repression occurring against Mayan Mam communities near Goldcorp's open-pit, cyanide-leaching mine. **"Gold Fever" Global Screening Day, on October 17, 2013**, is an opportunity for cinemas, NGOs, community groups, campus organizations, churches and others to screen the film together and have debates and discussion on the impacts of globalized industrial mining.

- Trailer: www.goldfevermovie.com
- To organize screening, contact Andrew Sherburne: andrew@northlandfilms.com

Invite your member of Congress, the Senate or Parliament and your local media to the screening. The U.S. and Canadian governments, and North American resource extraction companies and investors maintain full and profitable economic and military relations with the Guatemalan elites, almost always turning a blind eye to the mining related harms and violations. North American politicians need to see films like Gold Fever.

Tax-Deductible Donations

To support the community development, human rights and environmental defense work of ADISMI and FREDEMI, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

- United States: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887
- Canada: (Box 552) 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

Credit-Card Donations can be made (in Canada and U.S.):

<http://www.rightsaction.org/tax-deductible-donations>

- be a monthly credit card donor (Canada and U.S.)
- to donate stock, contact: info@rightsaction.org

Come See For Yourself

Form your own group of concerned folks and contact Rights Action to plan an educational seminar-delegation to Guatemala to visit with communities resisting the harms and violations begin caused by North American resource extraction companies, fighting to defend the well-being of their communities, forest and water sources, fighting for a community controlled model of development.

Endless, Dignified Struggle

While there is no end in sight to this mining operation – too many people and investors, mainly in North America, are making too much money -, there is also no end in sight for the courageous and dignified struggle of the local communities to put an end to the harms and violations they are suffering and to re-build their lives and communities.

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