

Aura Minerals & Honduran regime use corrupted legal system as tool of repression against Azacualpa community/ environmental/ human rights defenders

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/aura-minerals-honduran-regime-use-corrupted-legal-system-as-tool-of-repression>

... as Hondurans are endlessly forced to flee home and country, in this case due to mining repression, dispossession and violence



In 2018, a woman from the village of Azacualpa blocks a bull-dozer operated by Aura/MINOSA.

On October 23, 2018, Manuelito Rodriguez blocks Aura/MINOSA machinery:

"If I die, defending the remains of my loved ones, please bury me beside them"

("Si muero por defender los restos de mis seres queridos, que me entierren junto a ellos").

Aura Minerals & Honduran government "criminalizing" 19 Azacualpa community defenders

March 4, 2019, Statement by ASONOG (Asociación de Organismos no Gubernamentales) and MADJ (Movimiento Amplio por la Dignidad y la Justicia)

On Monday, March 4, 2019, criminal charges were presented against 19 members of the Azacualpa community in La Unión, Copán. The community members are accused of causing damage against the mining company MINOSA (Minerales de Occidente S.A.), subsidiary of the Canadian/U.S. Aura Minerals.

Digging up the dead for gold

These charges have been filed in the context of a long conflict caused by Aura/MINOSA ever since it started its mining operation in the area in 1997. Since 2012, this mining company has been attempting to dig up all the dead from the Azacualpa Cemetery, and move them, in order to exploit the gold underneath. The company has used diverse mechanisms and schemes to achieve its goals.

As a result of the legal hearing, the judges imposed “precautionary measures” against the 19 criminalized community defenders, including that the accused are not allowed to come near the mining operation, that they need to come into the court offices once a month to sign in.

Faced with this situation, ASONOG and MADJ state:

On January 31, 2019, the Attorney General of Santa Rosa de Copán presented charges against 19 members of the Azacualpa community, accusing them of the crime of damages against the mining company Minerales de Occidente and INCOB, which is subcontracted by MINOSA.

The claims to sustain these charges, are that the community members committed the crime of physical damages, because since May 16, 2018, the members of the community have sustained so-called “violent” demonstrations, to prevent the company from working. According to the charges, during these demonstrations, these community members are accused of carrying blunt and sharp weapons such as machetes and sticks. Community members are also accused of the alleged burning and destruction of the company security post and vehicles, costing the companies L.90,000 in damages.

Similar to trumped up criminal accusations in Guapinol and against community members in many other community defense struggles, such as Pajuiles, Jilamito, the evidence used to sustain the charges consists in the statements of witnesses, reports from the company’s private security company, and photographs said to be of those accused. In general, the photographs are of the accused and other community members, when they were throwing rocks against the vehicles, during yet another protest.

No consent to dig up dead, destroy cemetery

It should be noted that on January 11, 2015, during a town hall meeting, the Azacualpa Community voted AGAINST digging up the dead and then closing the cemetery for mineral exploitation, but despite the community’s decision, the municipal government and other entities of the local government have ignored this sovereign decision and have facilitated the company’s operations by all possible means.

Numerous legal proceedings against Aura/ MINOSA, but ... Impunity!

There are at least 20 legal complaints presented by the very people who have now been charged. These people have been subjected to threats, attacks and different types of

harassment by the security forces of Aura Minerals/MINOSA, the police and Aura/MINOSA workers.

Legal complaints have been made against the company for their environmental crimes caused by the leaking of spills of their lixivation pools which caused at least 3 waves of massive deaths of fish and the contamination of important water sources such as the Lara River, an affluent of the Higuito River. The last of these spills took place in June 2017.

In May and June 2018, a group of those being charged today, alongside another 30 community members, presented two writs of protection to demand the defense of the right to community sovereignty, health, culture and family which have been violated by Aura/MINOSA. Upon receiving these writs of protection, the courts ordered the suspending of the cemetery exhumations. Nevertheless, the Attorney General then ended its investigation into the community allegations of harms.

On September 25, 2018, the National Protection Mechanism for Defenders dictated protective measures for at least 9 of those now charged, due to the severity of the risks they faced because of their community, environmental and cemetery defense work and activism.

Aura/MINOSA aggression against community and cemetery defenders

From September to December, 2018, Aura/MINOSA increased the levels of confrontation, calling for pro-mining mobilizations to demand that the Attorney General allow them to renew operations; to the point that they took over highways and used a media campaign of harassment and persecution based on lies, claiming that there had been a total suspension of activities due to the writs of protection presented, when in reality they had continued mining operations, illegally.

Aura/MINOSA used the national media, and mostly local media as a platform to attack the Azacualpa cemetery defenders and the legal and support teams that have accompanied them.

The conflict in Azacualpa is not new.

Going back to the 1990s, mining activity in the municipality has caused the displacement and disappearance of entire communities such as San Andrés, Platanares and San Miguel. The local government along with state institutions have enabled this, facilitating the interests of Aura/MINOSA, alongside other coercive measures, including intimidation, in order to ensure the company's mining operation.

The behavior of Aura/MINOSA and of the Attorney General show a systematic pattern of aggression against communities defending their sovereignty against these "death projects".

ASONOG and MADJ call for solidarity of national and international social movements and human rights organizations. We reaffirm that the people know how to make justice a reality, and that, one by one, each and every public officer who has acted in the interest of

transnational extractive companies, or who has been an accomplice of these companies, will be held accountable for their actions; they will be held accountable before the people who live in dignity, who work tirelessly for true justice.

Santa Rosa de Copán, Honduras

March 4, 2019

ASONOG (Asociación de Organismos no Gubernamentales / Association of Non-Governmental Organizations)

MADJ (Movimiento Amplio por la Dignidad y la Justicia / Broad Movement for Dignity and Justice)

Why Hondurans and Guatemalans Flee

The U.S. and Canadian governments, the U.S. military, and North American businesses and investors (hydro-electric dams, mining, African palm, tourism, cattle, fruit, etc.) maintain profitable relations with corrupt, repressive governments in Honduras and Guatemala, turning a blind eye to and benefitting from repression, environmental devastation, human rights violations, corruption and impunity. Once in a while, the mainstream media reports on the plight of tens of thousands of Guatemalans and Hondurans fleeing, year after year, ignoring why they flee.

Pending destruction of the historic village of Azacualpa

Not only do most community members want the destruction of their cemetery and digging up of their buried loved ones to stop, but they know that Aura Minerals wants not only the gold under the cemetery, but also on the other side of the cemetery, up the mountain ridge, including – a few kilometers away – the historic village of Azacualpa.

Write/Contact

Write the company directly -- with copies to your media and elected politicians in Canada and the U.S. -- calling on them to immediately suspend all aspects of the Aura/MINOSA mining operation in Honduras, including the digging up of bodies.

Aura Minerals, Rodrigo Barbosa, President and CEO

rgoodman@auraminerals.com; info@auraminerals.com; www.auraminerals.com

Aura's head office: 600 – 4770 Biscayne Blvd., Miami Florida 33137, USA

Aura's operating office: 27 Fl. - 161 Bay Street, Toronto, Ontario M5J 2S1, Canada

Tax-Deductible Donations (Canada & U.S.)

Since 2014, Rights Action has supported the Azacualpa Environmental Committee and their environmental, community, human rights and cemetery defense work. To support their cemetery and community, human rights and environmental defense struggle, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

U.S.: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887

Canada: (Box 552) 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

Credit-card donations: <http://rightsaction.org/donate/>

Donations of stock? Write to: info@rightsaction.org

(Contributions can be made anonymously)

Mas informacion

Grahame Russell, Rights Action, grahame@rightsaction.org

Honduras: Ramiro Lara, ASONOG, ramirolara@asonog.hn

Please re-post and publish this information
Subscribe to e-Newsletter: www.rightsaction.org
Facebook: www.facebook.com/RightsAction.org
Twitter: <https://twitter.com/RightsAction>, @RightsAction
