

Aura Minerals –US-Canadian company– linked to drug trafficking & money laundering in Honduras

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/aura-minerals-linked-to-drug-trafficking-in-honduras>

Will this be business-as-usual for the U.S. and Canadian governments, strong supporters of the corrupted, repressive Honduran regime since the 2009 military coup ousted Honduras' last democratically elected government?

Will U.S. and Canadian government committees and judicial prosecutors investigate these links between Aura Minerals, its contracted companies and drug trafficking and money laundering?

INCOBE (Inversiones y Comercializadora Benitez), the major heavy machinery business partner of Aura Minerals and its Honduran subsidiary company MINOSA, has been criminally accused drug trafficking and money laundering.

SESER (Servicios Especiales de Seguridad), the private security business partner of Aura Minerals/MINOSA, has been linked to illicit drug trafficking activities links to Tony Hernandez, convicted drug-trafficking brother of Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez.

- **Below:** “Aura Minerals Linked to Drug Trafficking in Honduras”, by Karen Spring, Honduras Solidarity Network, Nov.25, 2019



(Arrested INCOBE owner and employees, are major heavy machinery company contracted by Aura Minerals for many years, La Prensa, Nov.25, 2019)

*** / ***

Aura Minerals Linked to Drug Trafficking in Honduras

By Karen Spring, Nov.25, 2019, <http://www.aquiabajo.com/blog>

Today, November 25, 2019, the Honduran Public Prosecutor's Office and the Military Police carried out eight raids of houses located in the northern and western departments of Cortés and Copan. During these raids, 7 individually owned businesses, 20 real-estate properties, 13 limited companies, and 320 vehicles were inspected and many were apprehended by authorities.

According to a communiqué released by the Public Prosecutor's Office, the listed assets and six accused individuals, are believed to be linked to the private company named INCOBE owned by Rigoberto Benitez Guerra. Rigoberto Benitez Guerra "has had unjustifiable economic growth with supposed ties to activities linked to drug trafficking" reads the public statement. Benitez Guerra and many of his family members were arrested during the operation according to a tweet posted by Honduran authorities.

INCOBE is Aura Mineral's Major Business Associate

INCOBE, the company named in the Prosecutor's communiqué, is a heavy machinery and transportation company that holds one of the largest contracts with Aura Minerals, a mining company legally incorporated in the U.S. and Canada.

Aura Minerals currently operates the San Andres mine in La Unión in the western department of Copan. For years, to 2016, Aura Minerals was a Canadian company headquartered in Toronto and currently maintains offices in Toronto, Miami, and the British Virgin Islands.

INCOBE has been contracted by Aura Minerals for years, to provide heavy machinery used in the mining operations including dump trucks that move crushed rock to the mine's cyanide-leaching pads. INCOBE's heavy machines are also currently destroying the 200-year old community cemetery of five communities including Azacualpa in the municipality of La Unión. Residents of Azacualpa have carried out resistance for many years against the mine's expansion into their community graveyard and to where their houses are located on the adjacent mountain.

INCOBE, like Aura Minerals, Linked to Human Rights Abuses Against Community Leaders

It is likely that INCOBE initiated its ventures into mining-related operations in Honduras through its contact and business experience gained through its relationship with Aura Minerals. According to Honduran public records, INCOBE holds three non-metallic mining concessions in three other locations in Honduras. One of the mines is an iron ore mine in El Nispero in the department of Santa Barbara.

In May 2013, the body of Rigoberto Lopez Hernandez, an anti-mining and community leader was found brutally murdered with signs of torture in the Santa Cruz community in El Nispero, Santa Barbara. Lopez Hernandez was one of many community residents resisting INCOBE's mining operation. Lopez Hernandez's throat had been slit, his tongue had been cut out, and his body was discarded in a public place during the height of the community's struggle as they demanded INCOBE and the local authorities suspend the mining operation. Lopez Hernandez, his community and others, had maintained a road blockade demanding its cancelation, as the mine would negatively impact the water source of many communities in the area. His murder sent a strong message to land defenders and communities fighting mining companies around the country.

SESER is Aura Mineral's Security Company

Not only is Aura Minerals' heavy machinery contractor INCOBE linked to drug trafficking but the security company, Servicios Especiales de Seguridad (SESER) that Aura Minerals contracts to provide security to the San Andres mine, has also been linked to illicit activities.

SESER is a family-run security company founded and owned by Angel Rene Romero, a well-connected former military commander that was part of the infamous military Battalion 3-16 that in the 1980s in Honduras was responsible for political assassinations and the brutal torture of state opponents. Romero is also a former Congressional candidate for the National Party of Honduras.

In 2012, SESER's assistant manager, José Javier Benítez Rosa was [shot](#) by assassins in Honduras' largest industrial city, San Pedro Sula. The murder was suspected to be linked to drug trafficking based on the manner in which the killing occurred – Benítez was driving a bullet-proof vehicle, followed by the assassins riding a motorcycle accompanied by a getaway pick-up truck, and was killed in the middle of a busy intersection at 9:30 in the morning in a major Honduran city.

Given the close relationship between the two companies INCOBE and SESER (both are companies based in Santa Rosa de Copan, business associates of Aura Minerals and other wealthy investors in western Honduras) and the shared last name with Rigoberto Benitez, INCOBE's owner, José Javier Benítez Rosa is believed to be a relative of Rigoberto Benítez.

Companies Contracted by Aura Mineral Are Drug Associates of Tony Hernandez, Convicted Drug-trafficking Brother of Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez

SESER former assistant manager José Javier Benítez Rosa's 2012 murder largely went unnoticed by Hondurans until seven years later, when his name was written on a list presented to a U.S. jury in the New York Southern District court during the trial of Juan Antonio "Tony" Hernandez, the brother of Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez.

The list was provided to the New York jury to assist the jurors in keeping track of the drug killings, relevant places mentioned as part of witness testimonies, and individuals involved in the present and historical context of the Honduran drug trafficking case.

As far as what has been reported (the U.S. court transcripts have yet to be released to the public), José Javier Benítez Rosa's name was mentioned when collaborating witness and confessed drug trafficker, Victor Hugo Díaz Morales or "El Rojo" testified before the court.

In his testimony, "El Rojo" confessed that he had been involved in Benítez Rosa's killing, which occurred in the context of a drug rivalry between himself and another drug trafficker Emilio Fernandez Rosa or "Don H". "El Rojo" explained to the jury that Benítez Rosa was working with "Don H" and because of the turf war between the two major drug traffickers, "El Rojo" had him killed along with several others.

"El Rojo" and "Don H" were close [drug trafficking associates](#) of Tony Hernandez (TH) who both purchased cocaine manufactured in drug labs owned by Tony Hernandez. In exchange for millions of dollars in campaign contributions to Juan Orlando Hernandez, Tony Hernandez and his brother protected both men from prosecution in Honduras and to a certain degree, extradition to the U.S. Tony Hernandez also was compensated for transporting El Rojo's drug shipments in Honduras and provided key information about police and military checkpoints.

Interestingly and possibly an explanation of INCOBE's role in drug trafficking and money laundering, "El Rojo" also explained to the New York jury that he transported drugs to the Honduras-Guatemala border in [dump trucks](#). Since "El Rojo" and "Don H" worked together for many years leading up to their drug rivalry and INCOBE owns over 300 heavy machines and large trucks, it may even be possible that INCOBE assisted in moving Tony Hernandez's and his allies' cocaine in Honduras or even, across the border to Guatemala.

Too Little, Too Late: "State-Sponsored Drug Trafficking" Continues

U.S. federal prosecutor Emil J. Bove [called](#) the role of Honduran institutions in protecting and promoting drug trafficking as "state-sponsored drug trafficking." According to Bove, millions of dollars in payments to Juan Orlando Hernandez and Tony Hernandez converted state institutions into institutions at the service of drug trafficking interests.

This state-sponsored drug trafficking took root in 2010, one year after the U.S. and Canadian-backed 2009 coup d'état in Honduras. Much of the growth, expansion, and success of Tony and Juan Orlando Hernandez's drug trafficking cartel goes hand-in-hand with the political and economic support of the U.S., Canada, and the European Union for the post-coup regimes.

Since Tony Hernandez's trial and damning evidence of the role of the Honduran judiciary, National Police and military, and the Public Prosecutor's Office in drug trafficking including protecting Tony Hernandez and Juan Orlando Hernandez's (named as a co-conspirator in NY drug case) business associates, the Public Prosecutor's Office has been conducting large-scale raids allegedly cracking down on money launder operations in Honduras.

These raids attempt to give the impression that the Public Prosecutor's Office is finally prosecuting money laundering activities and drug traffickers. However, many in Honduras believe that these actions are not only 'too little, too late' but that they are also another "state-sponsored drug trafficking" strategy to eliminate or neutralize figures that have key information, money laundering ties or business links to President Juan Orlando Hernandez, who fears extradition to the U.S. himself.

*** / ***

Will this be business-as-usual for the U.S. and Canadian governments, strong supporters of the corrupted, repressive Honduran regime since the 2009 military coup ousted Honduras' last democratically elected government? Will U.S. and Canadian government committees and judicial prosecutors investigate these links between Aura Minerals, its contracted companies and drug trafficking and money laundering?

Background

Since 2014, Rights Action has supported the Azacualpa Environment and Cemetery Defense Committee, in their environment, territory, human rights defense struggle against the harms and violence caused by this mine.

U.S.-Canadian company Aura Minerals about to dig up bodies, again, in the Azacualpa cemetery, destroy the cemetery, then destroy the community of Azacualpa, Honduras
<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/aura-minerals-is-about-to-dig-up-bodies-again-in-the-azacualpa-cemetery>

Tax Deductible Donations in the U.S. & Canada

To support the Azacualpa Cemetery and Environmental Defense Committee, and other human rights, environment and territory struggles in Honduras and Guatemala, make checks [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](#) in Canada and U.S.: <http://rightsaction.org/donate/>

More information

- Hector Antonio Trigueros, Comité ambientalista de Azacualpa (<https://www.facebook.com/azacualparesiste/>), +504 9622-3355
- Lisbeth Jimenez, ASONOG (<https://asonog.hn/>), +504 3308-2751
- Grahame Russell, Rights Action (<https://rightsaction.org>), +1-416-807-4436

Aura Minerals/MINOSA

info@auraminerals.com

+1 305-239-9332

www.auraminerals.com

155 University Ave, Toronto, ON M5H 4B6, Canada
78 SW 7th St, Aura Minerals @ WeWork, Miami, FL 33130, USA
Craigmuir Chambers, PO Box 71, VG1110, British Virgin Islands

Management

Rodrigo Barbosa, President & CEO, rbarbosa@auraminerals.com;

Sergio Castanho, SCastanho@auraminerals.com;

João Kleber Cardoso, kcardoso@auraminerals.com;

Richmond Fenn, rfenn@auraminerals.com;

Monty Reed, mreed@auraminerals.com;

Board

Rodrigo Barbosa, President & CEO, rbarbosa@auraminerals.com;

Stephen Keith, snskeith@gmail.com;

Philip Reade, philip.ream@outlook.com;

Follow work of other solidarity groups/ NGOs

Honduras Solidarity Network: www.hondurassolidarity.org

Witness for Peace: www.witnessforpeace.org

School of Americas Watch: www.soaw.org

Common Frontiers Canada: www.commonfrontiers.ca

Breaking the Silence: www.breakingthesilenceblog.com

NISGUA (Network in Solidarity with People of Guatemala): www.nisgua.org

Mining Watch: www.miningwatch.ca

CISPES (Committee in Solidarity with People of El Salvador), www.cispes.org

Alliance for Global Justice: www.afgj.org

GHRC (Guatemalan Human Rights Commission): www.ghrc-usa.org

Please share this information widely

More information: info@rightsaction.org, www.rightsaction.org

Subscribe to our free e-Newsletters: www.rightsaction.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/RightsAction.org

Twitter: @RightsAction

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/rightsaction/>
