

From: RightsAction [info@rightsaction.org]
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CANADIAN GOVERNMENT & MINING COMPANIES PURSUING GUATEMALAN RICHES

Below, you will find a series of connected articles:

- A Prensa Libre (Guatemalan newspaper) article, setting out how local Mayan communities do not want gold mining operations to take place in their region of Guatemala; and this, despite assurances that the Canadian Glamis Gold mining company and the Guatemalan government gave to the World Bank to secure a \$45 million loan, that they had carried out extensive consultations with the local populations, in accordance with international law!

- A Prensa Libre (Guatemalan newspaper) op-ed piece by James Lambert, Canadian ambassador to Guatemala, in praise of mining, making a series of mis-leading comparisons between mining in Canada and Guatemala, over-looking obvious and devastating truths about repression, exploitation and a lack of rule of law in Guatemala today, and about the negative impact of Canadian mining companies [ex: INCO] in Guatemala in the past.

- A Prensa Libre (Guatemalan newspaper) op-ed piece by a Guatemalan enviro-activist and journalist, responding to some of the points the ambassador makes.

RIGHTS ACTION Commentary: There are many other things that one could say of the Canadian Ambassador's comments. If the Canadian government feels so strongly about mining as a tool of good development economics, then why would Canada not support the efforts of Guatemalan-owned and operated mining companies to explore and exploit their own resources, for themselves ... ? The answer is obvious - Canada promotes mining in Guatemala (Honduras, Colombia, Peru, etc.) because it is good business for Canada and Canadian mining investors, not because it is good for local development in Guatemala (or wherever). Global mining more often than not is counter to and undermines good, sustainable development policies in Guatemala (and elsewhere).

Please re-distribute this information. If you want on-off this elist: info@rightsaction.org.

TO MAKE TAX-CHARITABLE DONATIONS for community development projects in Mayan and Indigenous communities in Guatemala and Honduras, where there are global mining companies making harmful incursions, see below. (Many thanks to Rosalind Gill for her solidarity work in translating these articles)

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Prensa Libre, November 4, 2004.

"OPPOSITION TO MINING ACTIVITY IN SAN MARCOS" -- Inhabitants of two municipalities declare that mining exploitation will cause harm to the environment, by Alberto Ramírez.

People living near mining projects in San Miguel Ixtahuacán and Sipacapa, San Marcos, have expressed their opposition to extraction of gold in the area. The majority of those who participated in a survey carried out by Vox Latina were of the opinion that not only would mining exploitation not benefit the community, it would also harm the environment.

A total of 95.5% of those surveyed were against the implementation of the mining project in the Marquense municipalities. The project is presently in the installation phase, and could begin extracting gold next year. Only 4.5% support the project. 96% of the men surveyed are opposed to it, as well, 94% of women, 95% of indigenous peoples and 96% of ladinos said they opposed it.

Despite the Government's insistence that these communities will benefit from the mining project, the local population has a different view of the situation. 83.5 % of those surveyed believe that gold extraction will bring destruction to the area, while 8.75 believe that it will create prosperity in the area. 83.5% believe that mining will have a negative impact, 11.5% believe that it will benefit the community.

95.5% of those surveyed are of the opinion that it is the owners of the mining company who stand to gain from this transaction, only 2.5% believe that the local population will receive dividends. On the issue of whether they knew that the previous government had granted a gold extraction concession in Sipacapa and San Miguel Ixtahuacán, 62% said they were aware of this, while 37.75% were not.

As well, the community does not believe that the Executive Branch will attempt to control the mining activity: 84% believe that the Government is not concerned about the fact that mineral extraction may harm the health of the local population and as well, harm natural resources. Only 10.5% believe that the Government is in fact concerned about these issues.

CONCERN FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

In the community, there is a basic concern for the preservation of our natural resources: 81.75% of the sample said that protection of the environment is important for them, while 11.75% said that development of the

economy and of the area is of more importance. As well, 54.75% responded that there are insufficient water supplies in the area while 45.25% said that there is enough water.

Environmental groups such as MadreSelva and Centro de Acción Ambiental share the local population's vision of the situation. These groups have pointed out that mining activity is responsible for the visual impact on the mountains, which have been undergone environmental damage. As well, they say that there is a risk of contaminating water sources through the use of cyanide to leach gold from other metals.

CREDIBILITY: THEY PLACE MORE TRUST IN THE CHURCH

The local population trusts the Catholic Church of San Marco more than the Government, given that the bishops are better informed on the effects of gold mining than President "scar Berger. 73.5% of the population of San Miguel Iztahuac and Sipacapa who participated in the survey were of the opinion that the Church knows more about the dangers of this mining activity than the Government. Only 13.75% believe that Berger is well informed. 12.75% chose not to participate in the survey.

One month ago, the Episcopal Conference, expressing fear of environmental damage, asked Berger to overturn the mining concession granted to the Marlin project (a Canadian company) in San Marcos. The Government responded by saying that the Church was poorly informed on the issue. This caused friction in the relationship between Cardinal Rodolfo Quezada Toruño and the Government. Later, Berger was forced to make amends.

79.29% of the community believes that the Catholic church of San Marcos knows the needs and problems of these communities better than the Government does. 11.5% believes that the Executive Branch is able to deal properly with these issues.

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Prensa Libre (Guatemalan Newspaper), November 4, 2004.

FEATURE ARTICLE: "Mining in Canada."

Like Guatemala, Canada is recognized throughout the world for its rich natural resources. by James Lambert, Canadian Ambassador to Guatemala

Is it possible for a country to be recognized as one of the most socially and environmentally responsible countries in the world, near the top of the list in the Environment Sustainability Index and at the same time, be a major mining country, with a mining industry that contributes 41.1 billion dollars to its economy?

This is indeed possible, and it is true of Canada. I have been following the national debate in Guatemala on the impact of mining, and as several Canadian companies have been implicated in this debate, I think it would be useful to examine the Canadian mining experience.

Like Guatemala, Canada is recognized throughout the world for the richness of its natural resources. We have been able to exploit these resources through our tourist industry, but at the same time, we have developed one of the most productive and technically advanced industries of the Canadian economy, through exploitation of our forests, water, metals and minerals.

The importance of natural resources in the economic development of a country cannot be denied.

However, if the tremendous potential for growth through the natural resources industry is to be maximized, attention must be paid to the manner in which social, economic and environmental issues are impacted, and the interests of all sectors effected must be accounted for.

This principle is also central to the concept of sustainability and can be seen in the motto of our Ministry of Natural Resources "Canada's Natural

Resources, Now and for the Future".

In Canada, mining exploration and exploitation is carried out in all provinces and territories, creating economic and social opportunities for many communities, including some 200 indigenous communities.

Through sustainable development of our mining resources, these communities are creating the economic, cultural and social infrastructure necessary to secure their future and the future of their children.

From its earliest history, Canada has been, and continues to be essentially a mining country. Throughout our long history of nearly 150 years of mining production, our country has become one of the most "intelligent" administrators, promoters, users and exporters of natural resources in the world.

Today, Canadian businesses are on the vanguard of high technology, environmental protection and social responsibility. This is why they are leaders of many of the most successful mining operations in the world. We invite you to visit our web page: www.guatemala.gc.ca

Ambassador of Canada to Guatemala (gtmla@international.gc.ca)

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Prensa Libre
November 5, 2004

Response to the Canadian Ambassador from the MadreSelva Collective:
Mining
in Guatemala, by Magali Rey Rosa

The debate over mining should focus on the impacts of this activity. Rather than comparing a southern country with a northern country, the debate should address the reality of the situation in Guatemala.

Yesterday, on this same page, the Canadian Ambassador, James Lambert, wrote an article in which he examines the experience of mining in his country. While the article is interesting, I do not think that it is

appropriate to
compare a country like Canada with a country like Guatemala.

In the first place, if we look at the size and population of both countries,
Canada has more than 9 million square kilometers of surface, while Guatemala
has a little less than 100 thousand square kilometers.
The population of Canada is 31 million and that of Guatemala is 11 million.
(2002) This means that Canada has 3 inhabitants per square kilometer, while
Guatemala has more than 100 inhabitants per square kilometer.

Canada occupies third place amongst countries with the highest human development index; Guatemala places 121st . The deforestation of Canada is
0.1 % annually, in Guatemala it is approximately 10% annually.

In Canada, the indigenous population is 1.5%, in Guatemala, it is more than
50%.

We can say that Canada is a large, sparsely populated country with a small
indigenous population, where most people live well.

Guatemala is a small, densely populated country, with a large
indigenous
population, where most people live badly. We could also include data on
justice and impunity, education, access to healthcare services, etc,
but I
believe that I have made it clear that the differences between the two
countries are profound, on many levels, and that it is thus not
appropriate
to attempt to compare them.

According to the United Nations, the increase in investment in mining
industries has had a huge negative impact on the lifestyle of local
communities around the world. Guatemalan communities who are opposed to
mining in their area are aware of this reality. The survey published
yesterday in the Prensa Libre testifies clearly to this.

I understand that one of the responsibilities of an ambassador is to
look
after the investments of companies from his country and therefore, as
many
of the transnational mining companies are based on Canadian capital,

Mr.

Lambert took the time to write an article on this issue.

But I believe that it is the responsibility of Guatemalans to ensure that the appropriate evaluations are carried out, because our country and our future are at stake. The debate over mining should focus on the impacts of this activity and should take the national (Guatemalan) reality in account rather than comparing a southern country with a northern country.

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To make TAX CHARITABLE DONATIONS for the community development work of community-based Indigenous development organizations, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to: UNITED STATES: 1830 Connecticut Av, NW, Washington DC, 20009; CANADA: 509 St. Clair Ave W, box73527, Toronto ON, M6C-1C0.

Donate on-line in the USA & Canada: www.rightsaction.org

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RIGHTS ACTION, with its main office in Guatemala, is tax-charitable NGO that supports community development, relief and human rights work in Chiapas, Guatemala, Honduras, Haiti, Peru, Nicaragua, and engages in north-south education and work related to global development and human rights issues.

CONTACT US:

- to come to Central America on a fact-finding educational delegation
- to be a community development and human rights accompanier in Guatemala

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