

GUATEMALA: OPEN LETTER BY VICTORIA HENDERSON TO IAN AUSTIN, CEO OF SKYE RESOURCES MINING COMPANY

Please re-distribute this info all around. If you want on-off this e-list:

info@rightsaction.org. For more info about North American nickel and gold companies in Guatemala and Central America:

info@rightsaction.org. WHAT TO DO?: see below.

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[PLEASE NOTE: I would like to encourage those interested in this case to review my initial letter to Skye Resources, of 28 September 2006, and Mr.

Austin's response of 9 October 2006, both of which Mr. Austin has posted to the Skye Resources website:

http://www.skyeresources.com/community/in_the_news/]

25 January 2007

Ian Austin, President and CEO
Skye Resources
Suite 1203-700 West Pender Street
Vancouver, BC
Canada, V6C 1G8

Dear Mr. Austin,

Thank you for taking the time to respond to my letter of 28 September 2006 regarding the activities of Skye Resources/CGN in El Estor, Guatemala. I appreciate your attempt to address my concerns and trust that you share my belief that Q'eqchi Maya peoples in El Estor deserve a reasonable and just resolution to the issues at hand.

When I visited Chichipate last August, community elders spent several hours explaining to me and my colleagues why they are opposed to your company's plans to mine in El Estor. The list runs long and includes not only concerns over property rights and environmental damage, but also fears about a resurgence of the deplorable violence that marked Canada's last mining experiment in the region. I refer here to the complicity of INCO/EXMIBAL in human rights abuses carried out during the 1970s and 1980s. As I am sure you are aware, Guatemala's Comisión de Esclarecimiento Histórico or Truth Commission has documented EXMIBAL's involvement in abductions, political killings, and multiple executions in Guatemala. Given that EXMIBAL was a majority owned subsidiary of INCO and that INCO is a key stakeholder in Skye Resources it is not difficult to understand why Q'eqchi peoples are concerned. The active participation of CGN employees in the most recent spate of land evictions in El Estor can only deepen this fear.

Having spoken with colleagues returning from El Estor and having watched video footage of the 'squatter' displacement, I must question your company's description of the evictions as unfolding in a 'peaceful atmosphere'. It would seem to me that there could be few things less peaceful than having one's home torn down or worse, burned down or by callous strangers, while a barrage of armed police officers watch on from the sidelines. The angry screams of a mother desperate to know where her now homeless children will sleep; the hopelessness of a man who can do nothing but bury his head in his hands and sob: these images provide a less than fitting testament to the 'peaceful atmosphere' of which you speak. If you have not already seen video footage of the evictions, I encourage you to view it by visiting the following site: <<http://www.rightsaction.org/video/elestor/eviction.mov>>

The absence of gunfire should not be confused with peace. At its most basic level, peace requires the security of self and home or two things Maya peoples in Guatemala have historically and systematically been denied. In the interest of both corporate transparency and personal integrity, I respectfully request that you rescind your comments about the 'peaceful atmosphere' of the evictions. Further, in place of using your company website to give thanks to the Guatemalan National Police for the 'professional manner' in which it carried out the evictions, I urge you to join the international community and indigenous organizations such as CONIC (National Campesino and Indigenous Coordination) in demanding that the Guatemalan government make reasonable and just reparations to the affected communities. Despite your website's statement to the contrary, the situation in El Estor has in no way been 'resolved'.

Resolution in this case requires that outstanding issues be addressed. I ask for your consideration of the following six points of discussion, raised in your letter of 9 October 2006:

1 - WOOD COLLECTION

You have indicated that Skye/CGN allows those with 'illegal permits' to transport wood through company property. I would like to take you up on the offer of learning more about how this program works. As you know, I was told by the elders of several communities that Skye/CGN prohibits wood collection from traditional Q'eqchi lands. If nothing more than a formality separates indigenous communities in El Estor from collecting the wood they need, then this issue should be relatively easy to resolve.

2 - PROPERTY RIGHTS

According to your website, Skye Resources has entered into an agreement with the Guatemalan government to survey and document land holdings in El Estor in order to determine 'exact property lines and tenure.' This strikes me as a serious conflict of interest on the part

of Skye Resources. Further, it sends a combative message to indigenous peoples whose lands are in dispute.

Not only should Skye Resources remove itself fully from the surveying process, but it should also cease exploratory activity until such time as exact property lines and tenure have been determined.

3 - LAND "DONATION"

I was told by the CGN Community Relations Team that weí (meaning Skye/CGN) donated lands to Chichipate. I accept that you are not claiming credit for such a gift and that you are not prepared to comment on any land transactions that might have occurred during the INCO/EXMIBAL operation.

Given that INCO is a key stakeholder in your company, however, I would ask your assistance in directing me to an appropriate contact at INCO in order that I may follow up on the land donation to Chichipate.

4 - RAXCHEÍ

It would be difficult to argue with the vision of Raxcheí that you outline in your letter. Improvements to the health and education of those living in the municipality of El Estor are of paramount concern. The problem, as I understand it from speaking with Qíeqchi elders, is that there is a significant breach between the Raxcheí vision and the Raxcheí reality. If there is one issue on which members of different local communities seem to agree, it is that Raxcheí is dividing indigenous people in the region. One hopes that this is not what Skye/CGN intended and that you will investigate in order to determine why this view seems so widely held. Your letter states that Raxcheí has five projects in Chichipate. Aside from painting the local basketball courts, which community elders acknowledge, I would appreciate if you could describe the nature of the other four Raxcheí projects in Chichipate.

5 - MAYA COSMOVISION

I respectfully submit that your understanding of Maya cosmovisiÚn fails to appreciate the deep spirituality that links Maya peoples to the Earth. I have visited Cerro 400 and you are correct in stating that, had I not been told, I would never have known that the area had been mined and reforested.

I, however, am not Maya. The idea that the earth can be gutted and covered over as if nothing had happened is wholly inconsistent with Maya cosmovisiÚn. Pointing out how unnatural a site may look after it has been mined is to confound the deeply spiritual with the highly superficial.

Moreover, it is to disrespect the history of Maya peoples. As one Qíeqchi gentleman explained at a public meeting on mining held this summer in El

Estor: "They (foreigners) come and bulldoze our land. It hurts us a lot, because we have dedicated many hours and much sweat in working that land." I understand that you have a job to do, Mr. Austin. However, I urge you, in carrying out your job, to remember this

gentleman's words. He was speaking as much to you as he was to me and to the others in El Estor.

6 - "COURTESY VISITS"

You have noted that it is the policy of the CGN Community Relations Team to pay 'courtesy visits' to communities in the municipality of El Estor. It seems to me, however, that it is the communities themselves that extend the true courtesy by allowing foreigners onto community property and by consenting to dialogue about a project that threatens both a way of life and a means of survival.

In conclusion, let me say again that I appreciate your having taken the time to address my original letter. Your last correspondence indicates that Skye Resources seeks to learn how to improve (its) consultation processes and to better understand how (it) is perceived in Guatemala. To that end, it is my sincere hope that you take the opportunity to reflect on issues presented above; that you address each of the six points of discussion; that you rescind your comments on the 'peaceful atmosphere' of the recent land evictions; and that you join those who demand that the Guatemalan government make reasonable and just reparations to the affected communities in El Estor.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

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WHAT TO DO:

* A fundamental element to work in favour of global justice, equality and the environment is to fund and support local organizations leading their own struggles in defense and promotion of development, the environment and human rights;

* Get involved in education and activism work in your home community concerning the negative impacts of North American investors and mining policies on community-controlled development, the environment and the

human rights of local populations in Central America and southern Mexico;

* Consider coming to these counties on an educational-activist delegation and invite us to give educational presentations in your home community;

* Get on our e-mail and snail-mail lists.

TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS: Make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail
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