



PHOTO-ESSAY:

**GOLDCORP Inc. MINING COMPANY in HONDURAS
Environmental destruction, Water depletion and contamination, and
Health harms in the Siria Valley, Honduras.**

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From October 26-31, Rights Action led an educational delegation to Honduras, to investigate the environmental and development harms and human rights violations caused by the Goldcorp Inc. open-pit, cyanide-leaching gold mine, in the Siria Valley, Department of Francisco Morazan, Honduras.

During our three day visit to the mining-affected region, we were hosted by the Siria Valley Environmental Defense Committee, a local organization that Rights Action has supported for a number of years. Everything we found during this visit re-confirms what Honduran groups, led by the Siria Valley Environmental Defense Committee, as well as Rights Action, other organizations and journalists have been reporting on the past few years.

"Entre Mares" is Goldcorp's wholly owned subsidiary in Honduras.

The Canadian flag flies by the main office of Goldcorp's "San Martin" mine. In previous visits to the mine site, one could see the U.S.A. flag as well. A chain-linked fence, topped by barbed wire surrounds the entire cyanide leaching, open-pit mining operation.

Community representatives from Sipakapa, Guatemala look at the cyanide laced, gold treatment pools in the Siria Valley --- similar to Goldcorp's cyanide laced, gold treatment pools in its "Marlin" mine in San Miguel Ixtahuacan, Guatemala.

THE DELEGATION WAS COMPRISED OF 15 PEOPLE:

Eight from Canada and the USA; seven from Guatemala. Two Mayan-Sipakapan people came from communities in the municipality of Sipakapa and 2 Mayan-Mam people came from communities in San Miguel Ixtahuacan. Both these municipalities are in the department of San Marcos and are being harmed by and suffering human rights violations caused by Goldcorp Inc.'s gold mine there. At www.rightsaction.org, or from info@rightsaction.org, you can get lots of information about that on-going mining-related struggle.

Three Mayan-Q'eqchi' people came from communities in the municipality of El Estor, department of Izabal, that are suffering development harms and human rights violations caused by the Canadian Skye Resources nickel mining company that is trying to re-start open pit nickel mining. At www.rightsaction.org, watch the 9-minute film, by Steven Schnoor about Skye Resources forcibly evicting impoverished Mayan-Q'eqchi' people in January 2007 from lands their families had inhabited for generations. (Also viewable at YouTube, search: El Estor evictions). Two members of our delegation had seen their huts destroyed.

One sees here part of the huge cyanide leaching "pad"/ hill, behind the treatment pools for the cyanide and gold laced water that leaches away from the pad/hill.

A CHRONOLOGY:

- While emergency relief measures were in effect in 1998, due to the devastation and loss of life caused by Hurricane Stan that was ravaging Honduras, the Honduran

Congress changed the mining laws, without public consultation.

- It is widely rumoured in Honduras that people associated with North American mining companies drafted the mining law that was soon after passed by a friendly ("corrupted" is the word we most often heard) Honduran Congress.
- Soon after Glamis Gold (later to become Goldcorp Inc.) got its mining exploration license without consulting the affected communities.
- Criminal charges were filed against Glamis Gold and the San Ignacio mayor for improperly granting the mining license. These charges languish today in the dysfunctional court system, as do all legal and administrative procedures related to the mine.
- In 2000, Glamis Gold began mining before it received a mining exploitation license. This has also been denounced before the competent political and legal authorities, to no avail.
- Goldcorp has been mining since that time. Huge profits have accumulated for company officials and investors along side of huge environmental destruction and health and human rights violations.

The basic process has been that of dynamiting and completely destroying part of a mountain range (on the right side of this photo) and moving the earth and rock to a vast cyanide leaching "pad" (center and left side of this photo). The entire center and left side of the photo are sprinkled constantly with cyanide solution that slowly leaches down through the "pad"/ hill, attaching chemically to the gold, and then seeping out the bottom where it is channeled to the water treatment pools.

OPEN PIT CYANIDE LEECHING MINING:

In hopes of attracting more investors, Goldcorp Inc. used to say on its website that it was the world's lowest cost producer of gold. "Low cost production leads to high profits and

high amounts of environmental destruction and health problems in our communities", our delegation was told by a community health worker in Porvenir (a municipality that has successfully kept Goldcorp from expanding its mining operation into their territory).

The open pit mining operation in Honduras is harmful to the environment, causing water shortage and water contamination and exposes the area's population to multiple health harms (skin diseases and infections, hair loss, respiratory problems, birthing complications). After improperly (what should be considered "illegally", according to a Honduran lawyer who spoke with our group) and undemocratically obtaining its mining licenses, the first step in the mining process is clear-cutting swathes of forest. Deforestation marks the first step towards water depletion. After clear cutting part of a mountain, the company blows up the entire area with explosives, causing multiple negative impacts: noise pollution, dust pollution, air and water contamination, destruction of flora and fauna, destabilization of dozens of campesino homes.

In the nearby town of Pedernal, Don Manuel Guillermo Velasquez (a member of the Siria Valley Environmental Defense Committee) shows the cracks in his home. We were told that dozens of homes have serious structural cracks. As we drove through Pedernal, and

other towns, our hosts would casually point to cracks in numerous homes.

Once the mountain has been clear cut and blown up, those sections of mountain, deemed by geologists to contain gold, are trucked to the cyanide leaching "pads"; the "pads" become effectively a new mountain unto itself. Here, huge quantities of cyanide are sprayed (via an extensive sprinkler system) continuously on the dynamited and transported earth.

This photo, taken from a nearby mountaintop, looks down on part of the leaching “pad” – effectively a new mountain. On the right-hand side, you can make out the sprinkler system spraying cyanide that soaks into the earth and rock, attaches to the gold and filters down through the pads, to drain out the bottom into pipes that take it to filtration pools.

We were told that for every two tonnes of mountain dynamited and loosened, one tonne is discarded on site; one tonne (that geologists have deemed to contain gold parts) is taken by truck to the “pads”. At the end of the day, it takes two tonnes of mountain, to produce 0.79 grams of marketable gold.

CONTAMINATION OF AIR AND WATER STEMS FROM:

- some cyanide remains in the “pads” and filters into groundwater.
- some cyanide from the sprinkler system gets blown into the air and dispersed by wind.
- some cyanide, mixed with earth, gets dispersed by the wind.

There is also the acid rain that results from the clear-cutting of forests, and then dynamiting of the earth, exposing heavy metals to oxidation and conversion to acid rain run off.

Cyanide-gold laced water drains out from the "pads", is collected and flows through pipes to filtering pools. Members of the local population, and the Siria Valley Environmental Defense Committee told us that, to cut costs, some of the cyanide-gold filtering pools were not lined underneath with thick plastic sheeting that helps minimize cyanide leeching and seeping into the earth and aquifers.

Driving around the edge of the mine site, we saw various places where cyanide-laced water was leaking out of the treatment pools and into the ground and local river systems. Low cost production also means there are no covers for cyanide pools; wildlife, particularly birds, enter the pools.

WATER:

In its mining operations, gold mining uses huge quantities of water. This is one more extremely contentious aspect of the 1998 Honduran mining law reforms – the granting to mining companies of unlimited right and access to use as much water as they want and need, to take water from any source they deem necessary, and to pay no money for the water. Over-use and contamination-abuse of water is central to understanding the environmental and health devastation caused by open pit gold mining.

As we drove through the municipalities of Porvenir and San Ignacio closer to the mine site, the number of dried out creeks coming down from the mountain range increased. The local population talks of some 20 creeks – that normally flow with water during rain season – being dry. As a result, the local populations suffer drought and water shortage. Agricultural production has decreased in the Siria Valley; the number of (mainly) young men migrating by land to the U.S.A. has increased notably since the mine began operations.

Given the water depletion, the company has dug wells for the local population, some of which have been found to be contaminated with heavy metals. Behind this "Entre Mares Water for Domestic Use" well, one sees the cyanide laced leech pad.

SINCE 2000, EXPLOSION OF HEALTH PROBLEMS:

Dr. Juan Almandares is a former rector of the National University, former Deacon of the

National Medical Institute, a former political prisoner and torture victim (during the time of the USA and western-backed military regimes of the 1980s) and a medical doctor. Founding member of Madre Tierra, an environmental defense and community development organization, Dr. Almendares has led many environmental and health study brigades to the Siria Valley to investigate the impacts of the mine.

After more than 6 years of studies of the earth and water and local population in the areas around the mine, Madre Tierra has found dangerous levels of numerous heavy metals (cadmium, arsenic, lead, mercury, aluminum) in blood and urine samples, and in the earth and water.

The main health problems they have documented are: Respiratory problems including bronchial asthma, pigmentation of skin, dry eye, muscular weakness in infants (and newborn calves) (that they attribute to contamination with heavy metals of susceptible embryonic tissues), an increase in miscarriages in women (again, also noted in cattle).

In the town of Pedernal, we walked house to house with local members of the Siria Valley Environmental Defense Committee, speaking with townspeople affected by some of these problems. Don Andres Velasquez Turcios, a 64-year old campesino complained of chronic skin infections and pain in his eyes ...

on his arms...

On his legs and feet ...

Julio Antonio Hernandez showed us the rash on his upper back and neck that he has had for over two years.

Dona Maura Arteaga Martinez showed us her infected feet. She told us she had spent L.70,000 of borrowed money (over \$3,500) on treatments (the rashes covered much of her body at one point). In Honduras, this is a huge amount of money where a

campesino might "earn" \$1000 in a year. She received no support from the company or government. We were told that hundreds of campesino villagers suffer from these health problems. Goldcorp/ Entre Mares says the health problems of the local population are due to hygiene problems.

In the relocated community of Palo Ralo de San Jose, we visited the home of Carla Patricia Avila to learn of the health situation of her two year old daughter, Lesly Yaritza.

Her father worked for 7 years in the mine, dealing directly with dangerous chemicals. Lesly's motor ability is impaired - she cannot walk at 2 years old, she cannot support herself standing or hold her upper body upright.

The community of Palo Ralo drank water for close to 4 years from this well that Goldcorp/ Entre Mares dug for them. It turned out that the water was contaminated with dangerous levels of heavy metals. The company has since shut down this well and locked it. No follow-up studies on the water have been permitted.

Hector, from the Goldcorp-affected municipality of San Miguel Ixtahuacan, Guatemala,

speaks with Roger Escobar of the Siria Valley Environmental Defense Committee.

THE PENDING CLOSURE OF THE MINE:

Goldcorp has published a mine closure plan, claiming they are winding down their mining operation. They have admitted to no responsibility for health or environmental problems. The closure plan they have released deals only with reforesting the areas where they mined, including reforesting the cyanide leaching pads! While most Hondurans do want the company to stop mining, they do not want Goldcorp to leave without providing full compensation for the harms and destruction it has caused.

IMPUNITY IS THE NORM:

Our delegation spoke with Bertha Oliva, of COFADEH (Committee of Family Members of the Disappeared in Honduras). Sitting in front of photos of some of the "disappeared" in Honduras, Bertha spoke of the structures of political and legal impunity. Formally a democratic country governed by the rule of law, impunity means that the political and legal systems always work in defense and support of the interests of the wealthy and powerful sectors ... and the Honduran elites are in favour of the mining industry.

Our delegation spoke with Clarissa Vega, former State environmental prosecutor, now working as a private lawyer. She explained that legal or quasi legal petitions had been filed in the Honduran courts and government offices and commissions that deal with mining, energy and environmental issues – all to no avail.

Police have suppressed demonstrations, like this national protest against mining, July 2007. (Photos:COPINH)

Detentions during national protest against mining, July 2007. (Photos:COPINH)
The lawyer reminded us: "There is a lot of risk to struggle against mining".

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MORE INFO: info@rightsaction.org

Rights Action (a tax-deductible organization in Canada and USA) funds and works with community-based development, environment and human rights organizations in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and southern Mexico (Oaxaca, Chiapas); and educates about and is involved in activism related to global development, environmental and human rights struggles.

MAKE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS for indigenous and community-based organizations (like the Siria Valley Environmental Defense Committee) that are implementing their own development, human rights and environment projects. Make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to: UNITED STATES: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887; CANADA: 422 Parliament St, Box 82552, Toronto ON, M5A 4N8. CREDIT-CARD DONATIONS: www.rightsaction.org.

CREATE YOUR OWN E-MAIL LIST: and re-distribute this and other information.

LISTEN: to the www.democracynow.org news program every day.

READ: Eduardo Galeano's, *Open Veins of Latin America*; Naomi Klein's, *The Shock*

Doctrine.

COME: to Guatemala, Oaxaca or Honduras on Educational-Activist Delegations to learn more about struggles for global justice, equality and the environment.

JOIN: Rights Action's e-mail and snail-mail lists.

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EXPRESS CONCERN ABOUT THIS MINE TO CANADIAN & COMPANY OFFICIALS:

Please write your own short note of protest and concern to Canadian and Goldcorp company officials. Send copies to the CPP (Canadian Pension Plan) and other major investors in Goldcorp. The main point to focus on is that while Hondurans want the mining to stop, because it is so harmful, they do not want Goldcorp to leave without providing a complete health, environmental and economic compensation program – one that needs to be independently agreed upon and verified.

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- Josée Verner, **Minister of International Cooperation**, House of Commons, Ottawa , Ontario, K1A 0A6, T: (613) 996-4151, Verner.J@parl.gc.ca

THE CANADIAN PENSION PLAN: (most employed Canadians are, by law, contributors to and beneficiaries of the CPP, a major investor in Goldcorp): Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, csr@cppib.ca, 416-868-4075, Toll Free: 1-866-557-9510.