

Rights Action – July 4, 2011
The Struggle To Hold Goldcorp Accountable

BELOW: an article by Grahame Russell

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Thank-you / Gracias a la vida ...

THE STRUGGLE TO HOLD GOLDCORP ACCOUNTABLE FOR THE REAL COSTS OF GOLD: The enormity of transforming an unjust, unaccountable global economic order

By Grahame Russell, July 2011

Not surprisingly, Goldcorp Inc. did not agree, at its annual general meeting in Vancouver (May 18, 2011), to a shareholder's resolution to suspend its "Marlin" mine in Guatemala, as ordered by the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR), an institution of the Organization of American States (OAS).

In the case of Goldcorp's "San Martin" mine in Honduras that it operated from 2000-2008, while it is temporarily closed many believe Goldcorp is waiting for the military-backed regime of Honduras to pass a new mining law that will heavily favor the global (predominantly Canadian) mining and investor sectors. In 2008, the government of President Zelaya placed a moratorium on granting new mining licenses, acknowledging that Honduras' mining law was completely inadequate. Zelaya's government was ousted in a June 2009 military coup.

Over the past 7 years, Rights Action and many other groups have documented a long list of health and environmental harms, and other human rights violations (including killings) in communities close to Goldcorp's mines in Honduras and Guatemala.

Yet, Goldcorp continues to mine gold and silver in Guatemala (and probably hopes to in Honduras). Huge profits continue to flow north to company directors, shareholders and millions of other investors across North America, including investors in so-called "ethical funds". Goldcorp also makes "gifts" of tens of millions of dollars to a variety of Universities – a practice of 'gold-washing' its corporate image.

The governments of Guatemala, Honduras and Canada have done nothing to investigate and hold Goldcorp accountable for the harms and violations, let alone to ensure respect for the suspension order of the IACHR. The OAS (Organization of American States) has again shown its weaknesses, doing nothing to insist upon respect for the suspension order.

A GOOD (NECESSARILY LONG-TERM) STRUGGLE

This is not a failure of education and activism work to put a stop to the harms and violations caused directly or indirectly by Goldcorp's two open pit/ mountain-top removal, cyanide-leaching mines in Guatemala and Honduras.

Rather, it is a reminder of the enormity of the challenge of ending the impunity and immunity from legal and political accountability with which mining companies operate around the world and of transforming an often-times unequal and unjust global economic order.

This impunity and immunity exist not only for mining companies, but also for many global industries producing fruits, bio-fuels, oil and gas, textiles, coffee, tourism sites, dams, etc.

Moreover, the impunity and immunity are not narrow legal issues (ie, a lack of enforceable laws – though they are that). They are broad political, economic and social issues.

Reflecting on a struggle (now 7 years old and counting) to put an end to and hold Goldcorp accountable for harms and violations at its mines in Honduras and Guatemala, I find two major learning points.

Firstly, as stated, this is part of a long-term struggle to transform the often-times unjust and unequal global economic order. Goldcorp is a normal mining company operating in a normal way in countries that are profoundly undemocratic, wherein the rule of law (administration of justice) is dysfunctional, at best, and corrupted in favour of the interests of the powerful, wealthy sectors, at worst.

This fundamental lack of democracy and rule of law are well known by the companies, as well as by the government of Canada.

All of this brings huge benefits to some, and causes huge suffering to others. It is the very global economic model that needs transformation, with its inherent inequalities and injustices, and lack of accountability, both inside and between nations.

Secondly, this remains an urgent struggle to reform laws in Canada and the USA so that enforceable environmental and human rights standards attach to all corporate and investor activities, whether at home or globally.

Any person or community from around the globe should have the right to file civil suit, or demand criminal proceedings in Canada and the USA, if and when their rights and well-being are violated or harmed by Canadian or American corporate or investor actions.

The Goldcorp struggle is just one more example of the need to break the North American wall of impunity and immunity from accountability.

INSPIRING RESISTANCE

While Goldcorp continues its mining operation in San Miguel Ixtahuacan, Guatemala, generating great profits and harms, it is worth high-lighting that this struggle and the resistance struggle in the Siria Valley of Honduras, where Goldcorp owns the San Martin mine, have served to inspire other communities across Guatemala, Honduras and elsewhere in Central America. The indigenous and campesino struggles have inspired others to take actions (holding community based consultations; doing community

education work; organizing peaceful resistance; etc) to stop mining in their communities before it starts.

DETERRING OTHER COMPANIES

These increasingly well-known struggles also serve as a cautionary note and partial deterrent to other companies that, like Goldcorp, would love to operate mines in Guatemala or Honduras where there is little mining oversight intention or capacity, and where the companies leave no more than 1% of profits in country.

Almost all the profits flow north, while all the harms, repression and other violations remain in these countries of the global south!

PUTTING A DENT IN THE IMAGE OF "CANADA THE GOOD"

Canada has long marketed the image of "Canada the good", a peace-maker country giving "aid" to the poor. As Goldcorp and other Canadian mining companies continue to cause harms, repression and other violations in countries across Latin America and the globe, the veneer has been taken off this myth.

UNREGULATED, UNACCOUNTABLE GLOBAL INVESTMENTS

This struggle has served not only to better educate Canadians and Americans about what some of our corporations are doing elsewhere, but also of how our own investments are often benefiting from unjust, harmful corporate activities.

More Canadians and Americans now know that they are (via pension funds, private funds and even so-called "ethical" funds) invested in Goldcorp - and in a long list of global companies that can and do cause harms, repression and other violations as part of their corporate operations - and that there is no direct way to hold our investment institutions accountable to even a minimum set of environmental or human rights standards. Over and over, we are reminded that our investment managers have one fundamental responsibility and fiduciary duty – to maximize profits!

A CANADIAN/ AMERICAN PROBLEM

Essentially, this struggle to hold Goldcorp accountable has served to educate North Americans that our governments and ourselves, as investors, voters, taxpayers and consumers, are also the enablers and beneficiaries of these sometimes unjust and harmful corporate and investor activities.

WHAT TO DO

"There are no magic answers, no miraculous methods to overcome the problems we face, just the familiar ones: search for understanding, education, organization, action ... and the kind of commitment that will persist despite the temptations of disillusionment, despite many failures and only limited successes, inspired by the hope of a brighter future." (Noam Chomsky)

Until we bring about legal, political and economic changes in Canada and the USA, companies and investors from our countries will continue to operate in ways, across the

planet, that often benefit from harms, repression and other violations, and from the fundamental lack of democracy and rule of law that exists in many countries.

Slowly and steadfastly, more and more Canadian and Americans must get involved in this, and similar, global corporate struggles.

-a- Support for local groups:

It remains imperative to fund and otherwise support community based groups in the mining affected communities who are leading the work (often at risk of repression) to put an end to the harms and violations. Delegations of concerned North Americans (including politicians, journalists, donors) must continue to visit the families and communities being harmed by mining, to learn from them, and to build direct solidarity alliances and partnerships.

-b- Follow the money – financial accountability:

As stated above, whether we know it or not, most North Americans are invested in Goldcorp and many more companies that directly and indirectly cause harms, repression and violations around the world. North Americans should investigate whether their own pension fund, private investment fund and/or "ethical" fund is invested in Goldcorp (let alone a list of other controversial companies and industries) and then start demanding the implementation of binding environmental and human rights standards to all investor activities.

-c- Follow the votes – democratic accountability:

As policy, the governments of Canada and the USA work endlessly to expand North American investor and corporate interests across the planet, via so-called "free trade" agreements and other bi-lateral deals, usually turning a blind eye to harms, repression and other violations that our investments and companies sometimes cause and/or benefit from.

This makes the harms, repression and violations our issues, and we need to hold our governments accountable to uphold the highest environmental and human rights standards in all of our international dealings.

-d- The message – media accountability:

Our media usually relegates corporate and investment issues to the business and financial sections, more often than not ignoring the environmental and human rights impacts of businesses and investments. Across North America, we need to keep on challenging our media to properly do their jobs.

LA LUCHA SIGUE / THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES FOR 'ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE'

Thank-you to all organizations and people involved in on-going efforts to hold Goldcorp and many other companies and investment firms accountable for the harms, repression and other violations they are causing and benefiting from, and who are involved, more broadly, in on-going efforts to create a just and equal global order. We look forward to continuing this struggle, over the years to come, with people and organizations in Guatemala, Honduras, Canada and the USA.

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Rights Action is a not-for-profit organization, with tax charitable status in Canada and the USA. We fund and work with community-based development, environmental, disaster relief and human rights projects and organizations fighting to eliminate the underlying causes of poverty, impunity and environmental destruction in Guatemala and Honduras, as well as in Chiapas [Mexico] and El Salvador.

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for community-based organizations working for community-controlled development, environmental justice, human rights & justice in Guatemala & Honduras (as well as El Salvador, Chiapas), make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

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