

Rights Action
March 7, 2012

BELOW:

- Article by Jody Williams, Nobel Peace Prize recipient in 1997
- “Resistencia”, new documentary about Honduras

Since the June 2009 military coup in Honduras, the country has become known as:

1. The murder capital of the world
2. A journalist-killing capital of the world
3. An LGBT killing capital of the world
4. And, most recently, the inmate killing capital of the world

The situation of repression, violence, corruption and impunity could not be worse. State repression has reached levels similar to the 1980s.

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WHAT TO DO: See below

LISTEN TO THE WOMEN OF HONDURAS

By Jody Williams, Ottawa Citizen, March 4, 2012

<http://www.ottawacitizen.com/touch/news/story.html?id=6247931>

This weekend thousands of mining industry people from across Canada and around the globe are in Toronto for one of the world's premiere mining investment conferences. Two speakers at the conference are from Honduras — the minister of the environment and natural resources, and the director of the mines ministry of Honduras — who will talk about "developing a new mining act for Honduras."

Up until recently, this small fact would not necessarily have caught my attention. But a few weeks ago I led a delegation of prominent women from Canada and the U.S. — lawyers, women's rights experts, journalists and artists — to Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico. There we heard testimonies from more than 200 women affected first-hand by the increasing levels of violence in the region.

In Honduras what we found is that the 2009 coup d'état and the subsequent crackdown on women opposing it have greatly fuelled a climate of already shocking levels of violence against women.

We expected to hear some tough things in Honduras — after all, the UN is now calling this tiny country the "murder capital of the world." But the situation was worse than we had imagined, even for those of us, including myself, who have long track records of working in Central America. Last year, in the first six months, 195 women were murdered — most were under 30 years old. It was hard to find a woman who had not been beaten, or beaten and raped.

Sadly, the very people who are supposed to be protecting women in Honduras pose the greatest threat to them, namely state security forces. And increasingly, private security firms being hired by mining companies, mega projects and the business elite in Honduras are also behind the extreme violence against women.

In Honduras, our delegation met with women who have been impacted by the San Martin mine in the Siria Valley. The mine is owned by a subsidiary of Canadian Goldcorp. The women talked about how the mining operation has contaminated local water supplies. They blame the poor water quality for mysterious skin rashes on children and adults in the community, and attribute findings of high arsenic in the urine and lead in the blood of residents living near the mine to the gold operations (now in the process of closing). Despite having spoken out about their concerns over the mine's effects on health for years, residents in the Siria Valley have yet to receive much medical attention or compensation.

Journalists trying to cover the story are also at risk. Since the coup in 2009, 18 journalists in Honduras have been killed. At least another 25 have faced death threats. A few days before we arrived in Honduras, Gilda Carolina Silvestrucci — a local journalist who was talking to

environmental activists about the problems with mining in the Siria Valley — received threats against her life and those of her children. Recently a journalist in Santa Rosa de Copan, where the Canadian company Aura Minerals operates, also reported receiving threats for having reported on concerns over mining operations in the area.

Understandably, these women have some very serious concerns about the highly touted mining law.

After meeting with Honduran President Porfirio Lobo and his security minister, none of my colleagues or I came away with any hope that this situation for women may change any time soon. The president blamed the violence on the drug trade, and the security minister said his hands are tied by weak legislation that does not allow him to crack down on police corruption and abuse.

What Honduran officials do seem eager to discuss is how Honduras is "open for business." The second morning of our visit, I was interviewed on one of the major morning television talk shows. Sitting next to me was Chile's deputy minister of mines, who was in Honduras to sign a new Honduran-Chilean mining agreement and provide some advice on the shaping of the new Honduran mining law. Honduras's minister of natural resources and environment — who signed the Chilean deal that day and is one of two Honduran officials who will present this week in Toronto — is part of a government that is clearly hoping that the new law will encourage the big mining companies to return to Honduras.

The proposed law would accelerate the licensing process for new mines in Honduras, including open-pit mines, and simplify the rules for mining companies planning to operate in Honduras. It would also reduce environmental standards and privilege water use by mining companies. At the same time, the new law would open the door for foreign states to become title owners of mining concessions, and it fails to ensure the communities that will suffer the most direct impact from the mining have any meaningful say over mining developments.

It appears that the Canadian government is eager for the deal. The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade was involved in bringing the two government officials to Toronto this week to attend the mining convention. They seem quite undeterred by high levels of

insecurity in Honduras, which likely helped put the country almost at the bottom of the list of the world's attractive places for international mining investments.

When we asked the women of Siria Valley what they wanted, their response was quite simple. They told us they want the public health issues in the Siria Valley addressed, and charges dropped against local activists who have been protesting against the mining. They also want to be included in consultations about the proposed law and any future mining concessions and to have their input taken into account.

In creating this new law, the Honduran government has bent over backwards to meet the needs of Canadian and other mining companies, but has carried out almost no consultations with Honduran civil society and community organizations. A recent survey shows that the majority of Hondurans reject open-pit mining and associate it with harmful affects to the environment and human health. These communities are now asking that the process to approve the proposed mining law be slowed down and their legitimate concerns be taken into account.

A few days after we left Honduras, the Canadian Embassy in Honduras sponsored a workshop on "corporate social responsibility" at which the ambassador said the Canadian government is working toward ensuring "benefits for communities where mines operate." Yet, the Canadian Embassy remains silent on the human rights abuses committed by mining companies, while playing a prominent role in facilitating high-level meetings for corporations that would be the beneficiaries of this law.

If the Canadian government is serious about a commitment to corporate social responsibility, it must demonstrate that commitment. Empty pronouncements will do nothing to respond to the needs of the communities affected by existing mines and opposed to new ones. Canada must ensure that the Honduran government consults with its own people, insist that the environmental and health impacts of existing Canadian operations are adequately addressed, and urge Honduran authorities to protect the right of Hondurans to dissent and freedom of expression.

Honduran women, their families and their communities deserve nothing less.

[Jody Williams is chair of the Nobel Women's Initiative, an organization that supports women human rights defenders around the globe. She won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 for her work to ban landmines.

Nobel Women's Initiative - Advocating for peace, justice and equality

430-1 Nicholas Street, Ottawa, ON, K1N 7B7, Canada

613.569-8400 x 112

www.nobelwomensinitiative.org

www.facebook.com/nobelwomen]

NEW DOCUMENTARY FILM "RESISTENCIA"

From: Jesse Freeston

Sent: Tuesday, February 28, 2012

Subject: Trailer released for new documentary film "Resistencia"

After months filming inside the occupied plantations of Honduras' Aguán Valley, I've unleashed a 5-min teaser for my upcoming documentary, RESISTENCIA: www.resistenciathefilm.com

The film follows 3,000 landless farming families as they occupy the palm oil plantations of Miguel Facussé, the richest man in Honduras. Over their two-year-long occupation, they've been threatened, jailed, beaten, had their homes burnt down, and more than forty farmers have been killed by Facussé's guards, the police, and the military, all of which work together to try and push them off the land. Despite this constant violence, the families are still there and they're not going anywhere.

The occupation began after the 2009 military coup d'etat — organized by Facussé and other oligarchs — that overthrew the only president that ever supported the farmers. Abandoned by the electoral process, the farmers took over the land and are now implementing their own democracy inside the occupied plantations.

MEDIA BLACKOUT

I returned to North America in late 2011 with this precious footage, expecting that the people who finance documentaries would recognize the importance of this story. After a few months of trying to get funding from traditional sources, I've learned that the industry doesn't believe that we (you and I) are interested in a documentary about peoples' struggles in Central America. One influential personality even told me that I had "a fascinating story and incredible footage", and that if it were happening in Iran he would fund it today. "Unfortunately though, nobody cares about Honduras," he said.

He's wrong.

If people don't care about Honduras, it's because the media either completely ignores Honduras or focuses exclusively on gangs and drug-trafficking, a tiny sliver of Honduran reality. I know that people do care about Hondurans, they've just never been properly introduced. And since flying everyone to the Aguán Valley isn't exactly reasonable, the next best option is a documentary film.

There is no reason why the Aguán Valley Occupation isn't mentioned in the same breath as Tahrir Square and Occupy Wall Street. But, we need your support to help break the media blackout on the Aguán.

AMY MILLER's IN THE MIX

So far, I've been talking a lot in the first-person, but I'm super-excited to announce that the incredible Amy Miller of Wide Open Exposure has come on-board as co-producer for Resistencia. I recently had the joy of helping Amy direct the Honduras chapter of her latest film, The Carbon Rush. I was blown away by her capacity to take such an ambitious project from conception to completion. The Carbon Rush is now finished, check out the trailer and keep an eye out for its release in festivals, theaters, and on TV later this year.

Amy's belief in Resistencia, combined with the skills and energy she brings to the project, is yet another reason why it's going to prove the industry wrong and get the story of the Aguán farmers out to the world.

WHAT's NEXT

A rough cut of the film is nearly finished, but my video skills alone aren't enough to do this story justice. The plan is to raise \$20,000 in the next month in order to hire: an animator, a sound designer, a web designer, and the fine video editor needed to really make this film shine. As well as to pay the brilliant Honduran musicians that have offered their music to the soundtrack.

This film is happening no matter what. But, with your solidarity, it is going to be soooo much better.

We've already raised more than \$5,000 in the first five days of the campaign, but there's still a lot to go. Ask people if they've heard about the Aguán. Share the trailer and website. Fund the film and get others to do the same. And definitely check out some of the funky perks that come with your donation. Of course, if you have other ideas of ways you can contribute to the project, send those along.

Lets do this. Nothin but the best...as always.

Jesse Freeston
Journalist and Maker of the Upcoming Film 'Resistencia'
www.resistenciathefilm.com

WHAT TO DO

HONDURAS DELEGATION, MAY 19-28, 2012

“The Coup vs. Democracy: Struggle of the Popular Movements”
Write to: afgj@afgj.org

GUATEMALA DELEGATION, JULY 7-15, 2012

“Community well-being, human rights & the environment * versus * mining companies that moil for gold (silver & nickel)”
Write to: info@rightsaction.org

TO MAKE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS

for indigenous and campesino organizations and local NGOs in Honduras and Guatemala working for community-controlled development,

environmental justice, human rights & justice, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

UNITED STATES: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887

CANADA: 552 - 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

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www.rightsaction.org

- In Canada:

<https://www.canadahelps.org/DonationDetails.aspx?cookieCheck=true>

- In USA:

<https://npo.networkforgood.org/Donate/Donate.aspx?npoSubscriptionId=488>

DONATIONS OF STOCK can be made (anonymously):

info@rightsaction.org
