

Rights Action  
July 16, 2012

## **THE FACES OF RESISTANCE TO MINING INJUSTICE ACROSS GUATEMALA**

By Grahame Russell, July 16, 2012

From July 7 to July 14, Rights Action facilitated an 8-day road trip through Guatemala, leading a group of 18 Canadian and American citizens concerned about health and environmental harms and other human rights violations being caused by (mainly) Canadian mining companies.



(All photos @ Grahame Russell, unless indicated)

Diodora Hernandez (photo: July 13, 2012) is a Mayan Mam campesina (subsistence farmer). She refuses to sell her land to the Canadian mining giant Goldcorp Inc. at their gold mine site in San Miguel Ixtahuacan, department of San Marcos, Guatemala.

On July 7, 2010, two men tried to kill her, shooting her point blank in the head. The bullet entered her right eye, exited by her right ear. She survived, miraculously. After 3 months in hospital, she came home, blind in one eye, deaf in one ear, ... and still today refuses to sell her land to Goldcorp, ... that is still today pressuring to buy land all around her home and plot of land. Even though Goldcorp acknowledged that the men who tried to kill her were former workers in their mine, no justice has been done for this crime.

### **ON THE ROAD, AGAINST MINING INJUSTICE**

Each of the communities our delegation visited is courageously denouncing and resisting a wide range of harms and violations, working peacefully and at risk of suffering repression to get these companies out of their communities. Young and old, men and women work passionately to protect their rivers, aquifers, water wells, forests, earth and over-all community well being.

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### **JULY 8: RADIUS GOLD**



We met with the communities of San Jose del Golfo and San Pedro Ayumpac, department of Guatemala, who are resisting mining interests of Radius Gold. For four months, they have been camped out on the main road connecting their two communities, peacefully blocking Radius Gold from beginning to operate its gold and silver mine. On a rotating basis, men and women, young and old, stay here permanently; they operate a communal kitchen.

On June 13, 2012, assassins on a motorcycle shot multiple times at Yolanda Oqueli, a mother of two and one of the community leaders. Today, one of the bullets remains lodged in her body, close to her spine. She is in stable, but risky condition.

The rest of the community – now more afraid than ever – remain committed to their peaceful protection of their community, to resisting the illegal and unwanted entry of Radius Gold. No justice has been done for the attempted killing of Yolanda; no one has been detained or charged.

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### **JULY 9: TAHOE RESOURCES / GOLDCORP**



We met with Oscar Morales, from the community of San Rafael las Flores, department of Santa Rosa. Along with the Committee in Defense of Life, and thousands of community members, Oscar is resisting the mining interests owned by Tahoe Resources and Goldcorp. Former Goldcorp CEO Kevin MacArthur recently incorporated Tahoe Resources and initiated this new project. Goldcorp has a 40% interest in it.

As with all the mining related struggles in Guatemala, and elsewhere across the Americas, no public and legally binding consultation was carried out in San Rafael las Flores before proceeding with exploration and actual mining.

As with all the cases, Oscar and the people of San Rafael las Flores are demanding a complete suspension of construction at the mine site, a suspension of the exploration licenses, and then they are demanding a transparent, participative and binding consultation process.

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### **JULY 10-11: HUBBAY MINERALS**

We visited a number of Mayan Qeqchi communities in El Estor, department of Izabal, who continue suffering harms and violations caused by a series of Canadian nickel mining companies, dating back to INCO in the 1970s and 80s, and continuing with Skye Resources and HudBay Minerals from 2004 forward. (In 2011, Hudbay sold its mining interests to the Russian company Solway).



On July 11, Fidelia Caal spoke, in her Mayan Qeqchi language, before a gathering of a dozens of Mayan Qeqchi people from 6 different communities that have long been harmed by nickel mining companies, as well as before our delegation. Listening, and translating into Spanish for her, on the left, are Maria Choc Cuc and her sister Angelica Choc, widow of Adolfo Ich a community leader who was assassinated on September 27, 2009 by security guards hired by the Guatemalan Nickel Company (CGN), subsidiary of Hubday Minerals.

For the first time in public, Fidelia Caal talks about the massacre of her family on January 23, 1982. That day, her parents and four siblings were murdered in her home, in the village of Chichipate. Her father – Felipe Caal – was one of the community leaders organizing villagers to oppose the illegal and unwanted entry of the Canadian mining giant INCO, that was found responsible, by the United Nations Truth Commission (1999) of collaborating with the Guatemalan military regime of the day to commit serious human rights violations against the local villagers, including disappearances and killings. (INCO was never held to account, neither in Guatemala nor in Canada, for these acts of repression.)



As the meeting in El Estor continued, Fidelia Caal sat beside Ana Maria Bac, the surviving daughter of Pablo Bac who was assassinated in 1980. Along with Felipe Caal, Pablo Bac was the other main community leader.



Our delegation visited the home of Maria Cuc Choc, where we listened as German Chub Choc (orange t-shirt) spoke about how he was left paralyzed and wheel-chair

bound when, on September 27, 2009 (the same day Adolfo Ich was shot and killed), he was shot and left for dead by security guards hired by the Guatemalan Nickel Company (CGN), subsidiary of Hudbay Minerals.

Miraculously, like Diodora Hernandez in San Miguel Ixtahuacan, German survived. After 2 years of hospitalization and recovery therapy (made possible by the Transitions Foundation of Guatemala, <http://transitionsfoundation.org/>) German now lives with his parents (to his left). Very poor before the shooting, their family economic situation is now dire, given German's on-going health needs and the fact that he can no longer work as a subsistence farmer or day labourer.

No justice has been done in Guatemala for any of these nickel mining related crimes.

### **JUSTICE IN CANADA?**

A main theme discussed in each of the mining related struggles visited was Guatemala's deeply entrenched impunity – that it is impossible to have any justice done in Guatemala, criminal or civil, for these harms and violations. Cory Wanless, a member of our delegation, explained how his law firm – Klippensteins – has filed 3 civil suits in Canada against Hudbay Minerals, for the killing of Adolfo Ich, the shooting-paralyzing of German Chub, and for the gang rape of 11 women in the village of Lote 8. (<http://www.chocversushudbay.com/>)

**“DEFENSORA”** - Watch a trailer for “Defensora”, a forth-coming film about the harms and violations suffered by the Mayan Qeqchi people, due to nickel mining companies, and their peaceful struggles for justice and remedies: <http://www.indiegogo.com/defensora>.

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### **JULY 13-14: GOLDCORP**

We ended our travels, visiting Mayan Mam communities in San Miguel Ixtahuacan, department of San Marcos, that are suffering and resisting harms and violations caused by Goldcorp Inc.



In the hamlet of Sacmuj, we spoke with family members of "Lencho" (Florencio Yoc, standing) about the threats and pressures they are receiving to sell their land to Goldcorp. They spoke of the trumped up criminal charges (including a capture order) aid against Lencho and four others in Sacmuj simply because they continue to work peacefully to protect their homes and water sources.



Sacmuj community members thanked our delegation quite profusely because we actually took the time to walk, with them, down a steep ravine to look at their sacred water spring. This tiny natural spring, guarded by a bow of pine branches, is the only potable water source for a number of families in Sacmuj, who walk up to an hour to draw water from here.



Modesta Bamaca, from Sacmuj, speaks softly in her Mayan Mam language about how sad and hurtful are the trumped up criminal charges, the physical and verbal attacks and the deep family and community divisions that now characterize their previously peaceful community.





In front of the home of Diodora Hernandez, Javier de Leon – a local community leader – translates from Mam to Spanish the stories of Diodora and her uncle, Don “Max” (Gerardo Maximiliano Hernandez). “Max” – a 72 year old campesino farmer – is also facing trumped up criminal charges, on behalf of Goldcorp, simply because he refuses to sell his land.

**“EXTRACTION”** - Watch trailers for “Extraction”, a forth-coming film about the harms and violations suffered by the Mayan Mam people, due to Goldcorp's gold mine, and their peaceful struggles for justice and remedies: <http://www.gprojectfilm.org/video/>.



On the back of a company truck, carrying Goldcorp mine workers to and from work, one reads the racist and denigrating phrase: "Don't blame the Indians for being Indians." ("No tiene la culpa el indio.")

#### **PEOPLE'S INTERNATIONAL HEALTH TRIBUNAL**

On July 14, our delegation had the honor of attending day one of the July 14-15 People's International Health Tribunal (<http://healthtribunal.org/>). At this uplifting and empowering forum, in the town of San Miguel Ixtahuacan, in the shadow of Goldcorp's huge and expanding open-pit/mountain top removal, cyanide leaching mine, hundreds of people came from across Guatemala, southern Mexico, Honduras and El Salvador, to give testimonies of the devastating health harms, and other human rights violations, they are suffering at the hands of Goldcorp Inc, and other companies, and to share strategies as to how to demand justice and remedy for the harms and violations, and to put an end to these destructive "development" businesses.

Here, we met again with some of the amazing community leaders we had just met with, in the previous days, in their home communities. Organizers are posting a huge amount of information and testimonies, and the conclusions of the Tribunal, at: <http://healthtribunal.org/>.

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#### **VICTIMS / SURVIVORS / PROTAGONISTS**

These are a few of the stories told to our delegation by people who have been victimized by mainly Canadian mining companies in the past (INCO, in the 1970s and 80s) and on-going today (Radius Gold, Tahoe Resources, Goldcorp Inc, Hudbay Minerals, ...).

Most of the people we spoke with are victims and survivors of serious harms, violations and repression, ... and they are also protagonists, amazing community leaders working peacefully and courageously to protect and defend their rivers, aquifers, water wells, forests, earth and over-all community well being, ... and to seek justice and reparations for the violations and harms they have suffered.

### **NO END IN SIGHT**

Global (mainly Canadian) mining companies are relentlessly pushing ahead, with the full backing of the governments of Canada, the US, Guatemala and other governments across the region, of the World Bank (that invested in Goldcorp's mine in San Miguel Ixtahuacan), and of investors - private equity funds and public pension funds - across North America.

It is an endemic, north-south problem that goes to the core of how the global economic model sometimes operates in a profoundly unjust and brutal manner.

There are many more communities in Guatemala and across the Americas – Mexico to Argentina, passing through the Caribbean – resisting the harms and violations caused by a long list of global resource extraction companies.

In the coming weeks, Rights Action will publish articles prepared by members of the delegation.

### **FUNDS & SUPPORT / SOLIDARITY / NORTH-SOUTH EDUCATION & ACTIVISM**

These delegations respond to 3 main aspects of Rights Action's work. 1- they help bring more funding directly to community based organizations; 2- they are a form of direct solidarity, by physically going – even for short visits – to visit and listen to people in their home communities, where they are suffering and resisting the harms and violations; 3- and, group members invariably going back to the US and Canada and get involved in educating North Americans about these north-south issues, and then working to hold North American governments, companies and investors accountable for their policies and actions that cause and benefit from these harms and violations.

### **NEED FOR FUNDS**

As part of our work, Rights Action regularly channels funds to all the people and communities mentioned above, and others. They use funds to plan and carry out their own community development, environmental, human rights and justice projects, and to provide emergency relief to victims of repression and health harms.

**TO MAKE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS (in Canada and the USA)** for people and communities mentioned above, and other community-based organizations in Honduras and Guatemala, 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

CREDIT-CARD DONATIONS can be made (in Canada and the USA):

<http://www.rightsaction.org/tax-deductible-donations>

DONATIONS OF STOCK can be made: [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org)

### **PARTICIPANTS**

Leanne Arango, Shannon Bali, Aaron Cain, Kalowatie Deonandan, Eliza Gardner, Todd Gordon, Cathy Grant, Bernadette Harris, MJ Harris, Eleanor Millard, Cyril Mychalejko, Craig Powers, Grahame Russell, Wyanne Sandler, Eric Schiller, Colin Stewart, Cory Wanless, Naomi Wolfe.

Thank-you to all. Send any comments or questions my way.

Grahame Russell  
[info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org)  
860-352-2448

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