

Rights Action
August 7, 2012

A NATIVE PERSPECTIVE OF GOLD MINING IN GUATEMALA AND IT'S DEVASTATING IMPACTS ON OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, THE MAYANS

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

BELOW: an article by one of the participants, Cathy Gerrior, a Mi'kmaq Elder and Ceremony Keeper from Turtle Island

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WHAT TO DO: See below

A NATIVE PERSPECTIVE OF GOLD MINING IN GUATEMALA AND IT'S DEVASTATING IMPACTS ON OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, THE MAYANS

By Cathy Gerrior, whiteturtlewoman@gmail.com, August 1, 2012

Kwe,

my spirit name is white turtle woman and i am a Mi'kmaq Elder and Ceremony Keeper from Turtle Island. i was given an opportunity to visit Guatemala by a group called Breaking the Silence. This is an organization who works towards justice and fair treatment of the Mayan People in Guatemala.

We joined a delegation in Guatemala led by Grahame Russell with the Rights Action group to learn the truth about the Canadian Mining Companies and what they are doing to our Mayan brothers and sisters in Latin America. Grahame was very thorough in his teachings around this issue. At one point i asked him if this work was his passion. He thought about it for a moment and replied, "No. It's my social responsibility."

It is majestic and deceptive to drive through the countryside of Guatemala with its volcanoes, and seemingly endless food and natural resources. It is shocking to learn that the Native people of Guatemala were forcibly evicted from their traditional lands so that all this could be produced for the sole benefit of Canada and the United States, and that the Mayan People are forced to work the fields during harvest for about \$2 dollars per day.

i watched in wonder as i saw corn growing up and down the mountainsides and learned that that is the crop of the Mayan People - corn and beans. They use all their land to sustain themselves and their families. Some also have some livestock - often chickens and pigs which have free reign to move about naturally. i noticed goats and a few cows, who were more confined. The effort it must take to plant and harvest these crops on such steep terrain. i heard that they tie themselves to a sturdy tree to rock in order to navigate the steepness. i frequently saw them

walking along the side of the highway carrying their hoes or hauling their firewood on their backs. Even the children were carrying their own loads of firewood.

It was both beautiful and sad to see this, especially once the realities of what is happening to the People was revealed when we reached our destinations.

We first visited the communities of San Jose del Golfo and San Pedro Ayumpac where they are blockading the mine entrance to Radius Gold. It was reminiscent of blockades here on Turtle Island.

The People standing together and saying NO to violations against Mother Earth, families, and communities. They take this stand at the risk of being shot (with no consequences to the shooter) because their traditional lands are all they have to support themselves and their next generations.

The mining companies trick their way into communities and then seem to stop at nothing in order to begin reaping obscene profits at the expense of the Native people and Mother Earth. i saluted their commitment to what is right in the traditional way of our People.

In San Rafael las Flores i listened to, (whom i saw as a natural leader), a man named Oscar Morales who said, "We are farmers. What did we know about mining? We had no idea that what they were telling us was all lies." He is educating himself now and arming himself with facts and truths about the different layers of ugliness that these mining companies create and inflict, in an attempt to protect their lands and communities. i pray often Oscar, that you are successful.

In El Estor, we met two sisters who are fighting a nickel mining company. The husband of one of the sisters was murdered by the company for resisting them and both have a brother in prison on trumped up charges for doing the same thing. They do what they can to help a young man in their community to was shot and paralysed by company men.

With some assistance from a friend who was also an interpreter, we were honored to perform a Healing Ceremony on these women to give them the strength to continue their fight. i understand that they are filing civil suits in Canada to try to get a measure of justice for the harms and violations inflicted on them by employees of the mining company.

i promised them i'd come back and ask the people here on Turtle Island to pray for them and their cause. i ask all who read this to join me in these prayers.

We went to a cemetery where they are exhuming bodies from mass graves of the "Disappeared People." Often women and children, but also those who were 'detained' over different periods of time. There are so many, dating back to the seventies; perhaps beyond. They were 'detained' for different reasons, but none of them legitimately. No trials were ever held and if i understand correctly, no charges were ever even filed against them. Their pictures are plastered everywhere, both in the cemetery and in the cities, placed hopefully and lovingly by the families looking for their loved ones.

i struggled with this the most. i was moved to do Ceremony at that place, speaking to the Ancestors specifically to the issue of, Truth. Memory. Justice. Grahame used those words frequently throughout the week we were together, and i will carry those very words with me always.

We travelled to mining communities closer to the Goldcorp mine where a Health Tribunal was being held for the people to come together to tell their stories to 'the world' and in some measure, hold the mining companies accountable for the atrocities being inflicted on the Mayan People in the name of 'Progress' but which really boils down to obscene profits for Canadian mining companies in operation in Latin America.

San Miguel Ixtahuacan. There we met Florencio Yoc who is being forced to protect himself and his land, sometimes by even his own family, from being unlawfully sold to the mining company. His land contains a natural spring that provides life-giving water to his and several other families living near him.

We met Diodora who was shot in the head by mining company employees because she refused to sell her land. She is now mostly alone and lonely due to the fear and community conflict created by Goldcorp. Still, she resists, doing what she knows to be right and living as best she can, which was once in harmony on Mother Earth. You are also in my prayers Diodora. i will never forget you.

Lastly, we attended part of the first day of the Health Tribunal. Goldcorp was found guilty of violations to both Mother Earth and to the Mayan People who are unfortunate enough to eke out their living on land rich in precious metals that mining companies covet.

From my conversations with these amazing people, they too believe that the taking of these metals that belong in the Earth creates an imbalance that negatively impacts all life on earth. They are deep in Mother Earth for a reason and that ravaging the earth for these metals unleashes things that we do not understand but are all negatively impacted by.

Is mining for precious metals evil? That answer has not been revealed to me. i believe though that mining in the way that these Canadian gold mining companies choose to mine, with total disregard to human life, rights and responsibilities, and at the expense of Mother Earth and all who dwell on her, for mere profits is, at the very least, blind greed. You judge the rest.

Please educate yourself. Then do something. It is all very devastatingly familiar. "Do what you know to be right" (The Ten Indian Commandments).

That is all i have to say.

Um Set Nogama (spelled like it sounds rather than true spelling). It means, "All my Relations."

(Cathy Gerrior, whiteturtlewoman@gmail.com)

WHAT TO DO - WRITE

Please send copies of this information, and your own letters, to your own Canadian and American politicians (MPs, Congresspersons, Senators) and other government officials, and to your own

media. North American resource extraction companies operate around the world with the full support of North American governments. Please send copies to pension funds across North America – like the Canada Pension Plan – that are invested in and profiting from most North American resource extraction companies around the world, with no real concern for environmental, health or human rights concerns.

WHAT TO DO - 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: [Box 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

QUESTIONS / MORE INFORMATION?

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