

Rights Action, October 26, 2012

GOLDCORP MINING IN GUATEMALA & THE SHOOTING OF DIODORA HERNANDEZ Two Years Later and Still No Justice Done

BELOW: an Al Jazeera news report (and two minute film) about Diodora and the Goldcorp mine.



(Diodora. Photo: Grahame Russell, February 2011)

In July 2010, Diodora Hernandez – a Mayan Mam campesina woman - was shot point blank in the eye by two men trying to kill her because she refuses to sell her land to Goldcorp Inc. She survived, miraculously, and lives on her land, today, still refusing to sell it to Goldcorp. Even though Goldcorp has acknowledged that the two men who tried to kill her were actual and former mine employees, no justice has been done for this attempted killing. As part of our work, Rights Action continues to provide emergency health funds to Diodora.

MORE INFORMATION:

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WHAT TO DO / HOW TO SUPPORT:

See below

GOLD MINE DRIVES WEDGE IN GUATEMALA COMMUNITY Supporters say Marlin mine creates jobs, but critics see it as exploitative and environmentally unsound

By David Mercer, Al Jazeera news, 25 Oct 2012

READ & WATCH minute interview with Diodora:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/10/2012102591134181236.html>

San Miguel Ixtahuacan, Guatemala –

Viewed from a thousand feet up, the Marlin mine resembles a scar cut deep across the Guatemalan countryside. On both sides of a sinuous road that winds down a mountainside, the patchwork of forest and field has been scraped and blasted away to expose the yellow-white rock that gives the land here incredible value. But the tiny flecks of gold that have turned this into one of the region's most profitable mines have also made it a source of conflict and controversy.

Fifty-eight year old Diadora Hernandez's story illustrates the dangerous divisions that have emerged since the mine started operations in 2005.

"My neighbors don't want to see me," said the diminutive grandmother one afternoon, sitting on a tree stump outside the small, dirt-floored house a few hundred meters from the mine. "They hate me because I won't sell my land to the mine. But my grandmother left me this land - it's mine and I don't want to sell it."

WATCH:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/10/2012102591134181236.html>

Hernandez said this stubbornness nearly cost her her life. One evening in 2010, two local men came to her doorstep and asked to buy a cup of coffee. When Hernandez returned with the coffee, one of the men pulled out a gun and shot her in the face point blank. She spent three months in hospital as a result. "I lost this eye," she said, pointing to her glass eye. "And I can't hear out of this ear."

Hernandez explained that she is certain her refusal to sell her land angered some local mine workers, who were worried their jobs might be at risk if the mine wasn't able to expand. She gestured to the tree-dotted pastureland around her and added: "All of the people in my community are compromised by the mine ... they all work there."

The two men later detained for the assault had worked for a company contracted by the mine.

GOLD IN THE HILLS

Located 300 kilometres west of Guatemala City, the Canadian-owned mine employs more than 2,000 people, the majority of whom are Guatemalan. Last year it produced 382,400 ounces of gold, earning the company \$607m - nearly five times what it earned in 2009. Reserves will support production until 2017, with further exploration expected to extend the life of its operations.

The region around Marlin is home to the Mam and Sipakapense people, two of Guatemala's 21 indigenous Maya groups. The communities here, like most Maya communities, have traditionally been neglected by the Guatemalan government and have high rates of poverty, illiteracy, and malnutrition.

Goldcorp, the company that owns Marlin, and their supporters say the mine has brought much needed economic development to the region, building roads, health clinics and schools. "Boys and girls that used to walk up to eight kilometres to receive an education can now (go) to school in their own communities due to the company's contribution to infrastructure," said Eduardo Villacorta, Central and South American Vice President of Operations. He added that the company is also committed to capacity building. "The objective is to train people so that when the company leaves they will have the opportunity to maintain a good quality of life, and more and better opportunities," Villacorta said.

But Grahame Russell, a human rights lawyer with the NGO Rights Action, told Al Jazeera the appearance of skin infections in the local population, cracking homes and threats against local activists tell a different story. "While the mine is certainly providing sustainable and substantial profits for investors, the only thing sustainable it is providing to the local indigenous

communities, besides a small number of very low paying jobs, is a long list of serious health and environmental harms, and other human rights violations," he said.

LACK OF CONSULTATIONS

In 2005, as the mine was preparing to open, local communities organised a referendum on whether to allow mining in their communities. The answer was a resounding no. Yet their voices were ignored, despite Guatemala's ratification of an international convention requiring the consent of indigenous people over decisions affecting them.

On May 20, 2010, allegations over dried-up wells, the contamination of water sources and negative health effects led the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) to grant precautionary measures to the local Maya communities. The commission called on the Guatemalan government to suspend operations at the Marlin mine. "We thought we finally had a victory," said community activist Aniseto Lopez. "But the mine will never take the blame."

Although the call for suspension made headlines across the country, the mine continued to operate as usual. Then a year and a half later, the IACHR revised the precautionary measure, requesting instead that the government "implement effective measures to prevent environmental pollution" and ensure local people have access to potable water.

Goldcorp celebrated the revision with this statement: "The Government of Guatemala's latest response to the IACHR demonstrates there is no evidence of negative impacts to public health or the environment as a result of operations at Marlin Mine."

But Lyuba Zarsky, a professor at the Monterey Institute of International Studies, disagrees, and said the revision came down to bullying. "The IACHR is coming under increasing pressure by Latin American countries to back off from intervening in large development projects," said Professor Zarsky, who co-authored a report about the Marlin mine. "But Goldcorp and other large mining companies will continue to face scrutiny and pressure."

In August Goldcorp made headlines again, this time in Canada, after it flew four Canadian MPs and a Senator to Guatemala in their company jet. The purpose of the all-expenses paid trip was to visit the Marlin mine and meet local government officials. While there was nothing illegal about the trip, it was widely criticised for calling into question the integrity and independence of Canadian elected officials and those appointed to represent the public.

BACK TO REALITY

Diadora Hernandez takes a break from herding her cows and sheep. Though she's been running at high speeds under the midday sun she's hardly broken a sweat. Sitting under a tall, shady avocado tree she looks out at the sweeping pastureland laid out in front of her. "Where else could I go," she said. "This land is part of me. It's where I was born. And it's where I'll die."

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Information: Grahame Russell, 1-860-352-2448, info@rightsaction.org

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