

Rights Action
January 16, 2013

"We must rapidly begin the shift from a "thing-oriented" society to a "person-oriented" society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered." - Martin Luther King

GUATEMALA IN 2013: More Mining Violence and Impunity

By Grahame Russell, January 16, 2013

A new year in Guatemala; same problems of violence, repression and impunity related to mining. The first two weeks of January witnessed outbreaks of violent protests and attacks at three mining operations. Dozens have been wounded; at least 3 people have been killed.

TAHOE RESOURCES (GOLDCORP INC.) in San Rafael las Flores

The most serious outbreak of violence took place in the municipality of San Rafael las Flores (department of Santa Rosa) where Tahoe Resources is hoping to open a gold mine. Goldcorp Inc. is the principal shareholder (40%) in Tahoe that is headed up by Kevin MacArthur, former CEO and President of Goldcorp.

For over two years, local citizens have peacefully protested against this unwanted and illegitimate mining operation. The operation does not have all of its permits, though Tahoe proceeds with work, and the local citizenry have been denied their right to hold a community consultation as to whether they want or do not want this type of "development" in their community. Community leaders have been threatened. Trumped up criminal charges (the 'criminalization of community defenders') have been laid against a number of community leaders.

Now, a bad situation has gotten worse. On January 12, a group of people, not from the San Rafael Flores municipality, cut electricity to the mine site, blocked roads, and then attacked armed security guards hired by Tahoe Resources. Three people were killed (including two Tahoe security guards) in the gunfire and 7 more wounded.

As a tense calm reigns in the region, the head of Guatemala's Department of the Interior, Mauricio López Bonilla, ominously stated that 'the attack might have been organized by the communities.' Local citizens are now even more afraid that the military supported regime of President Otto Perez Molina - himself a former General now accused of being an intellectual and material author of war crimes during Guatemala's worst years of State repression and genocide, 1978-1985 - will use this outbreak of violence as a justification to militarize the mining operation (in name of protecting it) and further repress the citizen opposition.

GOLDCORP INC. In San Miguel Ixtahuacan

Since 2004, Goldcorp Inc. has been operating a harmful and widely opposed mountain-top removal, cyanide-leaching mine in the indigenous Mayan Mam regions of the municipality of San Miguel Ixtahuacan (department of San Marcos). Widely documented are: fundamental lack of initial consultation with and permission from the affected communities; pressured and forced land sales; deforestation; use of explosives and massive mountain-top removal; cracked walls in hundreds of homes; air and water contamination; health harms in humans and animals; repression against local community leaders opposing the harms (including threats, attacks, shootings and deaths); etc.

On January 8, dozens of local citizens were protesting at the gates of the mine concerning a lack of new jobs and a company decision to not pay certain benefits owed to 2012 workers. Goldcorp security guards opened fire on the protesters and at least 7 locals were wounded.

NICKEL MINING in El Estor

Since the 1970s, a series of mainly Canadian nickel companies have been trying to operate a nickel mine in indigenous Mayan Qeqchi lands of the municipality of El Estor (department of Izabal). These operations – INCO in the 1970s & 80s; Skye Resources and Hudbay Minerals from 2004-2011 – have been characterized by: violent, illegal evictions of entire communities; repression against community leaders, including assassinations and shootings; gang rapes of women villagers; threats; jailings on trumped up criminal charges; etc.

Though Hudbay sold its subsidiary company CGN (Guatemalan Nickel Company) to the Cyprus based Solway Investment Group in 2011 for an estimated loss of \$290,000,000, Hudbay still faces lawsuits in Canada for a murder, a shooting-paralyzing and the gang-rape of 11 women villagers that Hudbay was directly and/or indirectly responsible for.

On January 7, local citizens were protesting over labour issues – some wanted to be re-hired as unskilled labour, some wanted jobs for the first time. They were told there were no jobs available for unskilled labour. On January 8, the angered locals took some CGN employees hostage, later to be released unharmed. One night later, some men set fire to buildings owned by CGN; others looted the buildings. On January 9, unknown men started shooting at the protesters, who were walking along the main road from the mine plant back to the town of El Estor. At least five men received medical treatment for bullet wounds.

NORMAL STATE OF AFFAIRS

Global mining companies, and a long list of private and public investors, are knowingly doing business in a profoundly undemocratic country wherein the rule of law is weak and corrupted in favour of the wealthy sectors. Violence and repression are not a crisis in Guatemala; they are predictable and logical and this situation will not change any time soon.

[The Canada Pension Plan continues to invest heavily in Goldcorp and Tahoe Resources - http://www.cppib.ca/files/F2012_-_YE/Publicly-Traded_Equity_Holdings_-_CDN_-_March_31_2012_-_Eng.pdf. Do you know where your private and pension funds are invested?]

The consistent response of the resource extraction industry, public relations statements aside, is to hire more private security guards, and get more “protection” from the Guatemalan army and police, ... all of which can only result in more violence and repression.

This vicious cycle will not stop, until North Americans, particularly Canadians in this case – from the government and elected politicians, to citizens and investors - hold their companies and investors to account for violence and repression that their mining operations and investments cause and benefit from, directly or indirectly, in many countries around the world.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

GOLDCORP MINING IN GUATEMALA AND THE SHOOTING OF DIODORA HERNANDEZ: Two Years Later and Still No Justice Done
Al Jazeera, October 25, 2012

<http://rightsaction.org/action-content/goldcorp-mining-interests-and-shooting-diodora-hernandez-two-years-later-and-still-no>

GOLD FEVER

Trailer: <http://www.gprojectfilm.org/announcing-release-of-gold-fever-trailer/>

Gold Fever is about gold mining and global impunity in Guatemala. In the film, Noam Chomsky asks: Is it proper "to benefit from over half a century of repression, violence, destruction, and elimination of democracy"? Goldcorp Inc. continues to mine relentlessly in San Miguel Ixtahuacan, despite 8 years of documented health and environmental harms and other human rights violations. Investors across North America - from public pension funds to private equity capital - profit from their investments, with no apparent concern for how the profits are made.

CLASHING WORLD VIEWS AT THE CROSSROADS

Guatemalan Mayan victims of mining repression came to Toronto, Canada to seek justice in court
By Grahame Russell, January 1, 2013

<http://rightsaction.org/action-content/clashing-world-views-crossroads>

SEEKING JUSTICE – CBC TV (4 minutes), Part 1, Nov.25, 2012:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0fkT3vLA6qg>

A group of indigenous people from Guatemala say a Canadian mining company was behind violent crimes and the destruction of their villages and they have come to Canada seeking justice. Warning, this story has graphic images.

A LONG ROAD – CBC TV (4 minutes), Part 2, Dec.3, 2012:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0O2sJtLqiw>

An update on a group of indigenous people from Guatemala who are in Canada seeking justice. They say Canadian mining company Hudbay is responsible for horrific crimes and to get the justice they want, they have a long road ahead.

DEFENSORA

By Rachel Schmidt, 5 minute trailer: www.defensorathefilm.com

"Defensora" documents the Mayan Qeqchi people's struggle, in eastern Guatemala, to reclaim their ancestral lands, to promote community development and environmental well-being, and to seek justice and remedy for the murder, shootings and rapes committed against them by Canadian mining companies in Guatemala.

THESE ARE "OUR" PROBLEMS: SAY NO TO "BUSINESS AS USUAL"

As distressful as these latest incidents are, they are not surprising, they are not an anomaly. The US and Canadian governments, and North American resource extraction companies maintain full and profitable economic and military relations with the Guatemalan elites, always turning a blind eye to repression, violence and impunity that are the norm in Guatemala.

Please send copies of this information, and your own letters, to your own elected politicians (MPs, Congresspersons, Senators) and other government officials, and to your own media, asking why our governments actually do nothing about the on-going impunity, repression and violence, while promoting and benefiting from economic and military relations with the Guatemalan regime and economic elites.

TO MAKE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS (in Canada and the U.S.) to support community controlled development and environmental protection work in 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 U.S.): <http://www.rightsaction.org/tax-deductible-donations>

be a monthly credit card donor (Canada and U.S.)

to donate stock, contact: info@rightsaction.org

GET INFORMED / GET INVOLVED

SPEAKERS: Contact us to plan educational presentations in your community

JOIN A DELEGATION: Form your own group or join one of our delegation seminars to Guatemala and Honduras to learn first hand about community development, human rights and environmental struggles

BALANCED DAILY NEWS SOURCES: www.democracynow.org / www.therealnews.com / www.upsidedownworld.org / www.dominionpaper.ca / www.rabble.ca / www.fsrn.org /

GOOD READING: Eduardo Galeano "Open Veins of Latin America" / Howard Zinn "A People's History of the United States" / James Loewen "Lies My Teacher Told Me" / Ronald Wright "Stolen Continents" / Naomi Klein "The Shock Doctrine" / Dr Seuss's "Horton Hears A Who" /

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