

Rights Action  
March 12, 2013

## **MINING RELATED HEALTH HARMS AND SUFFERING ENDEMIC IN HONDURAS' SIRIA VALLEY**

### **5 years after Goldcorp Inc. suspended operation of it's mountain-top removal, cyanide leaching "San Martin" mine**

#### **BELOW**

- open letter to women of Siria Valley, by Mining Watch and Development and Peace
- article by Mary Durran, Development and Peace
- links to 3 "cover-up" articles about how Goldcorp and Honduran authorities covered up reports about health harms caused by Goldcorp's mine
- back-ground information
- what to do

**MORE INFORMATION & HOW TO SUPPORT** the Siria Valley Environmental Defense Committee:

Grahame Russell, [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org)

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#### **OPEN LETTER TO HONDURAN SISTERS OF THE SIRIA VALLEY:**

#### **We Support your Struggle for Justice and Health**

March 08, 2013

(Ottawa/Montreal) On this International Women's Day, as sixty women from the Siria Valley of Honduras gather in Tegucigalpa, we the women of Development and Peace, Canada and MiningWatch Canada are present in spirit, sisters in solidarity, accompanying them in their struggle for justice.

Since 2000, they have lived in close proximity of the San Martin open pit gold mine owned by the Vancouver-based company, Goldcorp. Today, thirteen years later, and only two years since the closure of the mine, they have learned that levels of heavy metals in their bodies, or those of their children, are unacceptably high ([http://rightsaction.org/articles/Honduras\\_gold\\_cost\\_050911.html](http://rightsaction.org/articles/Honduras_gold_cost_050911.html)) and found a proliferation of skin and respiratory ailments in their communities (<http://rightsaction.org/action-content/serious-health-crisis-siria-valley-honduras-caused-goldcorp-inc>).

As women, effectively responsible for most domestic work in the household, they and their children have been most in contact with and are most vulnerable to contaminants through the water supply or other means. High levels of heavy metals such as lead and arsenic can lead to a broad range of diseases, including certain cancers and nervous system disorders.

We deplore the fact that the Honduran government has had detailed knowledge of this situation since 2007, having carried out blood and urine tests that revealed lead in the blood of those tested. Yet, the government did not disclose the results of the blood tests that the Honduran Office for Forensic Medicine through its Criminal and Forensic Science

Laboratory carried out with those involved until 2011 – not only failing to provide medical care, but effectively denying the women the right to seek treatment by their own means. Now, some six years later, the women are no closer to receiving the further information and medical care that they and their families and neighbours need.

We support the legitimate demand of the women of the Siria Valley and urge the Honduran government to assume its responsibility to carry out comprehensive epidemiological studies and new blood and urine exams. Once new testing has been done and the results determined, which should take place as quickly as possible, the Honduran government must immediately make the results available and ensure the appropriate medical treatment to the women and all those affected. This is an obligation of the Honduran government to ensure the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, set out by international treaties ratified by Honduras, and by the Honduran Constitution in which the state guarantees the right to a healthy environment.

We also urge a full and impartial investigation into the source of the contamination in order to determine what responsibility Goldcorp's San Martín operation might have and to then ensure adequate compensation for the families based on the results, as well as mitigation for damages in the communities, to their land and resources.

Such action is all the more urgent today in view of the new Mining Law, approved in the Honduran Congress in January 2013, with technical assistance paid for by the Canadian International Development Agency (<http://www.miningwatch.ca/news/honduran-mining-law-passed-and-ratified-fight-not-over>). With the imminent implementation of this legislation, hundreds of other new mining concessions, many granted to Canadian companies, will be open to mining activities, creating a state of insecurity for affected communities throughout Honduras based on environmental contamination and public health issues that have arisen in the Siria Valley and elsewhere in the country.

We support the urgent demand of the women of Siria Valley to overturn the mining law that has been adopted without consideration for the proposals from Honduran civil society that sought to guarantee communities a say over mining activities taking place in their communities before they begin, to guarantee them safe water supplies before prioritizing industrial use of water, and to prohibit open-pit mining, which they have seen seriously jeopardize the health of affected communities.

Dear sisters, women of the Siria Valley, today we salute your struggle and your bravery and determination to demand what is just. And we state our commitment to continue to stand by you, as you continue in this struggle.

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## **HONDURAS: DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE SUPPORTS THE WOMEN OF THE SIRIA VALLEY ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

March 8, 2013, by Mary Durran, Latin America Programs Officer

<http://www.devp.org/en/blog/honduras-development-and-peace-supports-women-siria-valley-international-womens-day-0>

It has now been two years since the suited managers of the San Martín open pit gold mine, owned by Goldcorp, packed their bags and left the Siria Valley in central Honduras.

They had spent literally hundreds of hours of air time, reassuring the population that the mine hadn't harmed the surrounding environment. As proof, they even built an eco-tourism hotel on the mine site, raised cattle and poultry and planted eucalyptus trees everywhere – although the thirsty nature of these in an area with a gradually diminishing water supply seemed to escape them.

But something is not right here. Where the sulphurs produced by the heap-leaching process, which uses cyanide, used to trickle down the mountain into the gullies, the grass and weeds are brown, parched and crisp. On the other side of the road, however, which was unaffected by the mine, the panorama is a verdant pasture with abundant vegetation. And when the rains are heavy, there is a strange, strong sulphurous smell that enters the air.

Ana Zuniga can feel it in her bones that something is not right. Or perhaps, more in her blood. Working with Development and Peace partner Caritas Tegucigalpa, Ana was one of 40 people tested by the Honduran government for heavy metal presence in the blood. For several years now, Ana complains to have suffered from patches on her skin, chronic headaches and loss of memory.

The people of El Porvenir and El Pedernal are not used to being treated like citizens by their government. But the injustice of the unannounced arrival of a mining company on their land, roused this rural population from a slumber encouraged by the government in rural Honduras.

It was back in October 2007, that Caritas Tegucigalpa managed to get the Honduran health ministry and the agency for the control of pollutants to work with them to take blood samples of 40 residents of the area around the San Martin open pit mine, and test for heavy metal presence in the blood. Samples were then sent to Colombia, where they were tested in a laboratory.

When the results were returned in a manila envelope, in the midst of persistent campaigning by the community about the San Martin mine and its alleged ill effects on the health of the population and the environment, they were relegated to a drawer in government offices. No one could get the government to reveal anything.

But the cat was let out of the bag in February 2011, when a cabinet reshuffle led a government minister to decide he had nothing to lose and released the results of the tests: Ana and almost all the others discovered they had mercury and arsenic levels more than 700 times the acceptable levels in their blood. Those most seriously affected are women. It is believed it is because women come into contact more with water while performing domestic tasks. In the long term, heavy metal presence can cause nervous diseases and certain cancers.

“Why did the government keep the results to itself for four years, denying those affected the chance to seek medical treatment?” asks CEHPRODEC lawyer Donald Hernandez. Most of the affected do not seem overly surprised that their government has once again failed to treat them with the respect due to citizens. CEHPRODEC has filed recourse with the Ministry of Health, calling on it to immediately test for current levels and provide the appropriate medical attention.

But they know that a lawyer's demand is not enough: it will require the mobilization of the population, who will have to take to the streets to demand justice. In the wake of a new mining law approved last week and which will bring new mines to the area, the women of el Porvenir and Pedernales plan to spend time visiting other communities to warn the residents of what might be the high price to pay.

The women of Siria Valley have also organized a protest on International Women's Day to demand that the government provide medical care for their conditions and to oppose the new mining law. Development and Peace has sent the women a letter in support of their struggle for justice on this International Women's Day.

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## **GOLDCORP AND HONDURAN GOVERNMENT "COVER-UP"**

3 "cover-up" articles about how Goldcorp and Honduran authorities directly and/or indirectly covered up official government reports about health harms caused by Goldcorp's mine:

- <http://rightsaction.org/action-content/cover-1-goldcorp-entre-mares-government-honduras-hide-information-about-poisoning>
- <http://rightsaction.org/action-content/cover-2-evidence-acid-waters-siria-valley>
- <http://rightsaction.org/action-content/cover-3-sick-ex-mining-company-employees-protest-front-supreme-court-justice>

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## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

ALL THAT GLITTERS ISN'T GOLD: A story of exploitation and resistance  
2008 (10 minutes version of longer film)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-tmqXc5rX8s>

All That Glitters Isn't Gold tells the stories of community members residing near Goldcorp's "San Martin" open-pit/ mountain-top removal, cyanide-leaching gold mine in Honduras' Siria Valley. Villagers discuss the serious harms and violations they have experienced since the mine began operating – including health problems related to water contamination and depletion - contesting Goldcorp's claims that the mine has been a model of beneficial development for the community and has caused no adverse effects.

THE REAL COSTS OF GOLD MINING: Goldcorp in Honduras  
2008 (9:51 minutes, English with Spanish)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhV9lgZT4gg>

In the Siria Valley, Honduras, local citizens speak for themselves about the devastating impact of Goldcorp Inc's "San Martin" open-pit/ mountain-top removal, cyanide-leaching gold mine on their lives and communities.

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## **RIGHTS ACTION**

The roots of Rights Action's work go back to 1983 in Guatemala and 1998 in Honduras. Since then, and particularly since 1995, Rights Action has been funding grassroots

organizations working for community development and the environment, for disaster relief, for truth, memory, justice and human rights, and for democracy and peaceful resolution of conflicts in Guatemala and Honduras, as well as in southern Mexico and El Salvador. The Canadian Rights Action Foundation (CRAF), founded in 1999, is independent from Rights Action (USA).

### **SAY NO TO "BUSINESS AS USUAL"**

As distressful as the on-going health crisis is, in the Siria Valley, it is not surprising, it is not an anomaly. The US and Canadian governments, and North American resource extraction companies maintain full and profitable economic and military relations with Honduras' post-military coup (2009) regime, turning a blind eye to repression, violence and impunity in Honduras, and to the legacy of Goldcorp's mine there.

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 this work, 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](mailto: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](http://www.democracynow.org) / [www.therealnews.com](http://www.therealnews.com) / [www.upsidedownworld.org](http://www.upsidedownworld.org) / [www.dominionpaper.ca](http://www.dominionpaper.ca) / [www.rabble.ca](http://www.rabble.ca) / [www.fsrn.org](http://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" /

**Comments / Questions:** [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org)

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