

Rights Action
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In western Honduras, communities are being displaced by Toronto-based Aura Minerals' San Andres gold mine. Earlier this year the Honduran army was sent in to quell protests related to the relocation of the local cemetery in Azacualpa, a village in La Unión. This is part of the human cost of an expanding mining industry in Honduras.

Below:

- Canada-based Aura Minerals Ready To Expand Open-pit Gold Mine, Including Into Community Cemetery, by Karen Spring
- Blood For Gold: The Human Cost Of Canada's 'Free Trade' With Honduras, by Sandra Cuffe

The Canadian government has been on a roll, promoting the interests of Canadian extractive industry corporations in Honduras in the five years since democratically elected president Manuel Zelaya was ousted in a U.S. and Canadian supported military coup d'état in June 2009.

Canada-based Aura Minerals Ready to Dig up the Dead in Honduras

By Karen Spring, spring.kj@gmail.com, November 7, 2014
<http://desdeaquibajoabajo.blogspot.com/2014/11/community-evicted-for-protecting-their.html>

In April 2014, the community of Azacualpa blocked the entrance of the San Andres mine in La Unión, Copan, in western Honduras. The open-pit gold mine is owned by Minerales de Occidente, a subsidiary of Toronto-based mining company, Aura Minerals who [acquired](#) the mine in August 2009.

A few weeks after initiating the blockade, the community was violently evicted by Honduran military and police who beat protesters including minors, shot tear gas, and arrested those that stuck around to fight the evict or that lived close to where it took place. Radio Progreso [reports](#) that various people were arrested and 21 community members face charges requiring them to sign before a Honduran judge every month.

According to a community member that asked that her name not be revealed because of the delicate security situation in the area: "A large group from the community and former employees of the mine blocked the entrance of the mine for 15 days. The company refused to negotiate, they told us that they had nothing to say to us. The military arrived, beat, and captured some people ... I think 15 people, but I'm not sure, many were injured."

A 20-minute video shot on a community member's cell phone (that is shaky and needs some editing) caught and recorded the eviction: <http://desdeaquibajoabajo.blogspot.ca/2014/11/community-evicted-for-protecting-their.html>

Upon initiating the blockade, the residents of Azacualpa were protesting the expansion of the mining operation, including a potential threat that operations would expand into the community's cemetery. According to Radio Progreso's [report](#), the Azacualpa residents agreed to be relocated to a new area before the operations expanded, but since the agreement was reached the company's commitment

failed to materialized. However, despite the relocation agreement, the community leadership says that they did not want the company to operate in the cemetery, where approximately 400 families lay their loved ones to rest.

As Orlando Rodriguez, the Vice President of the patronato (the community leadership) [told](#) Radio Progreso:

"They [the mining company] want to exploit the land of the cemetery but the community is not in agreement, we have our public deed that gives us the power to prevent it. They claim that they have permission to exploit 50 metres from the cemetery, we as the elected community leadership decided to consult the people house-by-house and the majority do not agree that the remains in the cemetery are removed, but they have used force because they have militarized the area and continue to exploit."

Following the eviction, Honduran military remained in the community for approximately three weeks and Aura Minerals continues its operations that a community member described as "very close to the boundaries of the cemetery."

"They put military soldiers in the cemetery, there are only guards now but yes, after that, a lot of time passed, I think three weeks, that the military was patrolling. There were a lot of military cars patrolling the area. They were going to put up a big gate so that people could not enter [the cemetery]."

Ending a seven-year mining moratorium, the law was [approved](#) in January 2013. Mining operations - many of which are owned by transnational corporations - are expanding and/or beginning in various parts of Honduras. Canadian companies like Aura Minerals have directly [benefited](#) from the new legal framework that was written with [support and assistance](#) from the Canadian government and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Since its approval last year, two legal challenges have been presented against the law and various communities and organizations argue that the process in which the law was written and the law itself, [completely ignore](#) the demands of communities that have and will be affected by mining operations in their territory.

Blood For Gold: The Human Cost Of Canada's 'Free Trade' With Honduras Canadian mining companies accused of filling their pockets and leaving a toxic legacy

By Sandra Cuffe, sandra.m.cuffe@gmail.com

<https://ricochet.media/en/177/blood-for-gold-the-human-cost-of-canadas-free-trade-with-honduras>

[This is the first installment of a three-part series by Sandra Cuffe. Part two in the series investigates Canadian tourism and real estate projects displacing Afro-Indigenous communities along the Caribbean coast. The final installment takes a look at Canada's role in the militarization of post-coup Honduras.]

Aura Minerals

In the rural municipality of La Unión, Copán, in western Honduras, communities are being gradually displaced by Toronto-based Aura Minerals' San Andres gold mine. Earlier this year the army was sent in to quell protests related to the relocation of the local cemetery in Azacualpa, a village in La Unión. This is part of the human cost of an expanding mining industry in Honduras.

Goldcorp Inc.

Rodolfo Arteaga says he understands what people in Azacualpa are going through. "I experienced it firsthand," he says. Arteaga's home community of Palo Ralo was displaced in 1999 to make way for Vancouver-based Goldcorp's San Martin open-pit gold mine in the Siria Valley, 100 kilometers north of Tegucigalpa, the Honduran capital. His new home in New Palo Ralo is less than two kilometers from the mine's cyanide-leaching facilities. Production ended in 2008, but the mine's impacts persist.

Blood Poisoning

Thousands of kilometers away from the company offices where corporate social responsibility promotional materials are drawn up with photos of smiling Central Americans, Arteaga and countless other Siria Valley residents suffer from serious health problems. Blood and hair tests have consistently revealed high levels of arsenic, mercury and lead in both children and adults. Water resources and the local agricultural sector have not recovered.

Communities throughout the country have seen the legacy of devastation in the Siria Valley, and many Hondurans share Arteaga's perspective on what Canadian mining companies have to offer. "What interests them is getting rich, filling their pockets with money and taking it out of the country," he says.

The Canadian government has been on a roll promoting the interests of Canadian extractive industry corporations in Honduras in the five years since democratically elected president Manuel Zelaya was ousted in a June 2009 coup d'état. Development aid, embassy resources and foreign affairs programming have all helped set the stage for new legislation conducive to Canadian corporate

"Free" Trade Agreement

The Canada-Honduras Free Trade Agreement came into effect on Oct. 1, 2014. Canada had originally planned to negotiate a regional free trade agreement with Honduras and its neighbours, Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador. After nearly a decade of stop-and-start talks, Canada opted to pursue a bilateral agreement with Honduras in 2010, less than a year after the coup. The deal was announced during an August 2011 visit to Honduras by Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, the first head of state to visit the country after its readmission into the Organization of American States two months earlier.

The free trade agreement, though, is just one recent element of Canada's promotion of its business interests.

Canadian Government and CIDA Push For New Mining Law!

"In Honduras, Canada's use of overseas development aid and its diplomacy to promote corporate interests are really evident, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the military-backed coup in 2009," said Jennifer Moore, Latin America program coordinator at MiningWatch Canada.

The Canadian government's tacit support for the coup and silence during the ensuing systematic human rights violations, said Moore, were an important preface to what came later, following the November 2009 elections widely denounced as fraudulent. "Canada set about, with representatives from the Canadian embassy, together with representatives from CIDA, to start to lobby for a new mining law," she said.

The Purpose of the 2009 Military Coup

Before Zelaya's ouster, his advisors had been working directly with mining-affected communities and grassroots and non-governmental organizations to draft a new mining law, taking into account their demands for a national ban on large-scale open-pit metallic mining. The Zelaya administration also renewed a moratorium on mining concessions initiated by his predecessor Ricardo Maduro amid demands for mining legislation reform from affected communities, environmental movements and other organizations.

In 2006, the Supreme Court ruled 13 articles of the General Mining Law unconstitutional. The 1998 law had been passed by Congress in a single debate shortly after Hurricane Mitch hit the region. In its wake the hurricane left thousands of deaths and disappearances, more than a million people homeless and billions of dollars in damages, including an estimated 70 per cent of the country's transportation infrastructure.

As with Hurricane Mitch, the 2009 coup provided the conditions for the imposition of new legislation without critical input from community organizations.

A Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade document obtained by the Center for Excellence in 2011 revealed that the Canadian government characterized the Zelaya administration as "anti-mining" and Porfirio Lobo Sosa's contested government (which began in 2010) as "pro-sustainable mining and pro-CSR (corporate social responsibility)." The same document states that a post-coup mining law draft was "designed to promote mining investment."

Passed in January 2013, the new law lifted the moratorium on mining concessions and was heavily criticized for its lack of measures to protect populated areas, water resources and even national parks from mining. In the three years leading up to the law's passage, Canada used a combination of overseas development aid, embassy resources and other government funds to finance technical support for the new law and a Honduran mission to the 2012 Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada meeting, along with high-level meetings between Canadian and Honduran government officials and Canadian mining company executives.

"As part of Canada's poverty reduction efforts, and in response to a growing recognition of the importance of the private sector (including the extractive sector) in international development, Canada has been increasing its efforts to work with the private sector to help improve the lives of people living in poverty," Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development spokesperson Caitlin Workman wrote in an email response to Ricochet.

The new bilateral free trade agreement provides protection for Canadian investments in mining and other sectors in Honduras, but exactly how much investment will be covered is unclear. "Canada's two-way merchandise trade with Honduras has grown 58.6 per cent in the last five years to reach \$278.7 million in 2013," wrote Workman. However, DFATD would not provide recent figures for Canadian foreign direct investment in Honduras. "That information is not publicly available," wrote Workman.

The promotion of Canadian mining interests in Honduras exemplifies the priorities laid out in the government's 2013 Global Markets Action Plan, which states that all "diplomatic assets of the Government of Canada will be marshaled on behalf of the private sector." On Oct. 28, 2014, Moore and representatives from the Canadian Network for Corporate Accountability and the Osgoode Hall Law School-affiliated Justice and Corporate Accountability Project addressed the issue at an Inter-American Commission on Human Rights hearing in Washington, DC.

“The hearing was called principally to address Canada’s extraterritorial responsibility and obligations for the abuses taking place throughout Latin America and the Caribbean in connection with Canadian mining companies,” said Moore. “It’s recognizing the reality of addressing human rights and Indigenous rights violations in a globalized context.”

Community Resistance

Back in Honduras, communities throughout the country continue to resist mining activities in their territories at great risk. Chapter 10 of the Canada-Honduras Free Trade Agreement protects Canadian investments, but leaves local residents vulnerable. Honduras has the highest per capita homicide rate in the world, and murders of community leaders, activists, environmentalists and Indigenous movement participants are all too common.

“We’ve been working on a number of different fronts and struggles,” said Xiomara Gaitán, president of the National Network of Mining-Affected Communities. Marches, roadblocks, municipal referenda and other actions against mining continue to take place on a regular basis. “Communities are prepared to not let any mining company enter.”

Honduras: The 2009 Military Coup That Keeps On Giving --- repression, violence and global business opportunities

This is not only a Honduran problem; this is also a U.S. and Canadian problem. Keep on sharing this information with your families, friends and networks, and sending copies to your MPs, Congress members and Senators, and media.

Since the June 2009 military coup, that ousted the last democratically elected government, Honduras has become the ‘Murder Capital of the world’, the ‘Repression Capital of the Americas’.

Since 2009, the U.S. and Canadian governments have legitimized a succession of illegitimate, repressive regimes. North American companies and investors, and “development” banks (World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank) have increased business activities in African palm production, maquiladora sweatshops, privatized “model cities”, tourism and mining. The Honduran regime remains in power due, in large part, to its political, economic and military relations with the U.S. and Canada and the “development” banks.

Across Honduras, community based organizations – struggling for fundamental reform to the Honduran State and society - need considerably more human rights accompaniment, funding, media attention on the harms and violations and education and activism in Canada and the U.S.

Contact:

- Member Of Parliament:
<http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Parlinfo/Compilations/HouseOfCommons/MemberByPostalCode.aspx?Menu=HOC>
- Congress: <http://www.house.gov/> to get info for your member of Congress, and call: 202-224-3121
- Senate: <http://www.senate.gov/> to get contact for your Senator, and call: 202-224-3121

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To support community-based groups working for community-controlled development, the environment and the rule of law in Honduras and Guatemala, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

- Canada: (Box 552) 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8
- USA: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091
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