

Say 'No' To Aura Minerals Digging Up The Dead, Destroying Cemeteries, To Mine For Gold

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- Action Needed: Write to Aura Minerals, and your member of Parliament: Say no to forcing people to “agree” to the digging up of their dead and the destruction of their cemeteries

On June 7, 2016, Aura Minerals (Canadian gold mining company), and the Honduran Government, Army and Police exerted serious pressure on the Azacualpa community to force the signing of an “agreement” to dig up the dead from, and then destroy the community’s 200 year old cemetery, so that Aura Minerals can continue its cyanide-leaching, mountain-top removal, gold mining operation.



Aura Mineral’s gold mining operation. Photo Asonog.



Meeting of Azacualpa community members next to their 200 year old cemetery that Aura Minerals – backed by military and police – aims to dig up and then destroy. Photo Rights Action, April 2016

Rights Action, with an 11 person delegation from Canada, Australia and the United States, was present during the June 7, 2016 meeting referred to below, and attests to the information expressed in these communiques prepared by the Azacualpa Environmental Committee.

An Agreement Under Pressure

Environmental Committee of Azacualpa, June 8, 2016

In Azacualpa, Municipality of La Union, Copan, on June 8 2016, members of the Environmental Committee convened to emit a statement in regard to the so-called “Act of Conciliation”. We would like to express and manifest the following on this issue:

FIRST: An Agreement Under Pressure

Yesterday, June 7 2016, we met in the Alvaro Contreras Official Institute in the city of Santa Rosa de Copan. The following people were present in the meeting:

- Hector Leonel Ayala, Minister of the Interior, Human Rights, Justice and Decentralization;
- Abel Contreras, Departmental Governor of Copan;
- Coronel Mario Edgardo Padilla, Commander of the 120th Infantry Brigade;
- National Police Commissioner Henry Amilcar Márquez Quintero;
- Monty William Reed, Manager Aura Minerals (Minerales de Occidente); and,

- other representatives of the government and Aura Minerals (and its Honduran subsidiary company, Minerales de Occidente).

The meeting's objective was to resume the conciliation process between Aura Minerals and the Azacualpa community. We would like to clarify the following:

Minister Hector Leonel Ayala led the discussion during this meeting, and, through actions of psychological pressure, forced Azacualpa community members to sign an "Act of Conciliation", which we believe to be incorrect. Although the Environmental Committee of Azacualpa represents the interests of the Azacualpa community, the Committee cannot sign agreements without reaching absolute consensus, and without prior consultation with the community.

The international observers (members of the Rights Action delegation) present can attest to this psychological pressure.

The Environmental Committee of Azacualpa is aware that this problem with Aura Minerals (Minerales de Occidente) is a long-standing one, and is aware of the importance of promoting dialogue as the way to resolve the conflict, but agreements cannot be signed under pressure!

It is not right for the government and Aura Minerals to bring representatives of the Honduran army and police to the discussion table, let alone to also sign the "agreement." That constitutes psychological pressure against the members of the Environmental Committee of Azacualpa.

The international observers (members of the Rights Action delegation) present can attest to this psychological pressure.

SECONDLY: Pressuring The International Observers

We also denounce the attitude of the Departmental Governor, Abel Contreras, who - without it being on the agenda of this meeting - took it upon himself to call attention to the international visitors from Canada and the United States. They were only there as observers.

During this "extra" meeting, the Governor utilized most of the "discussion" time to tell them that they should not get involved in the issues of this country. Additionally, he said that in the future, they should request permission from the Interior Ministry and the La Union Municipality before they can visit the Azacualpa community to observe the situation of conflict between the community and the Canadian company Aura Minerals.

The representatives of Aura Minerals expressed themselves in a similar manner towards the International Observers. Engineer Javier Romero and his lawyer asked the foreigners a series of questions and gave them warnings in regard to the social investigation that they are carrying out on the human rights violations committed by Aura Minerals.

In this sense this "extra meeting" with the foreigners was far from diplomatic, friendly and informative about what was happening in our community, and became almost an interrogation,

leading community leader Genaro Rodriguez to request that the Governor put an end to the unwarranted “meeting”.

Conclusion

For all of these reasons, we would like to clarify that we continue to sustain our position in favor of dialogue and we respect the negotiation agreed upon by the Azacualpa community who are those most affected by this problem.

Similarly, we request that the government representatives respect our human rights, intervening in the resolution of the conflict, but without forcing community leaders to unwillingly sign “agreements.” To make a comparison, it is obvious that the manager of Aura Minerals - Monty William Reed - does not sign any agreement without consulting his bases in Canada!

Moreover, the presence of representatives of the Honduran army and police should not be permitted at the discussion table, because it conveys a message of fear and intimidation to the members of the Environmental Committee.

We hope that our observations and requests will be considered for future meetings.

Sincerely,
Environmental Committee of Azacualpa
June 8, 2016



After Hector Leonel Ayala, standing (Minister of the Interior, Human Rights, Justice and Decentralization) signed the “agreement”, then Coronel Mario Edgardo Padilla, Commander of the 120th Infantry Brigade, signed it ... (All photos June 7, 2016, Rights Action delegation).



After the Coronel, the National Police Commissioner, Henry Amilcar Marquez signed....



Then Monty Williams Reed, manager of the Aura Minerals (Minerales de Occidente) mine ...



After that, the Minister of the Interior, Hector Leonel Ayala, approached members of the Environmental Committee of Azacualpa, one by one, to have each of them sign the agreement.

A Forced “Act of Conciliation”

Environmental Committee of Azacualpa
June 13, 2016

We, the members of the Environmental Committee of Azacualpa, La Union, Copan, inform the media and society at large that:

As you already know, we have participated in a three-party discussion table between the community, Aura Minerals (Minerales de Occidente) and the Honduran government, facilitated by the Commissioner of Human Rights (CONADEH).

On Tuesday, June 7, 2016, we were called by the Minister of the Interior, Hector Leonel Ayala to the Instituto Oficial Alvaro Contreras, to continue with the dialogue in accordance with the preliminary agreement signed on May 5, 2016.

In the June 7th meeting, an “Act of Conciliation” was elaborated, which was written by Mr. Javier Romero, a representative of Aura Minerals (Minerales de Occidente) and Mrs. Iris Mariel Tabora. We members of the Committee were not allowed to participate in writing the document.

Similarly, the Governor of the Department of Copan forced a compañera who was observing the process of writing the Act to leave.

Later, the Minister of the Interior, Hector Leonel Ayala, ordered the reading of the Act, without permitting any form of analysis or observation of that document. He proceeded to bring the Act to every member of the discussion table for signatures. The minister argued that it was going to rain soon and that his helicopter would not be able to take flight.

The presence of the National Police Director of Copan, the Commander of the 120th Infantry Brigade and many soldiers and police near the institute, who were there without credentials made us feel pressured and besieged. We felt obliged to sign that act that denied us the right to review and observe the document, and the right to consult with our bases.

We raise our voice and request the assistance of authorities or national and international human rights organizations to help us ensure the respect of our constitutional rights and to support us in the struggle for our community.

Azacualpa, La Unión, Copan

June 13, 2016

Aura Minerals

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Send copies to your Member Of Parliament

- <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Parlinfo/Compilations/HouseOfCommons/MemberByPostalCode.aspx?Menu=HOC>
- Canadian embassy in Honduras: Centro Financiero CITI, 3d Floor, San Juan Bosco, Colonia Payaqui, Box 3552, Tegucigalpa, T: (+504) 2232 4551, tgjpa@international.gc.ca

Emergency Funding – Azacualpa Cemetery Defense Struggle

Please help support the Azacualpa Environmental Committee. Make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

- U.S.: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887
- Canada: (Box 552) 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

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More information

- Grahame Russell, Rights Action, grahame@rightsaction.org
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