

Trying -!!- to divest from Goldcorp Inc. – Profits over human rights and the environment

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United Church of Canada Pension Board defies will of church, refuses to divest from Goldcorp

"Our church and our society teaches us that we must not turn a blind eye to abuse and yet we continue to enable Canadian mining companies to abuse our neighbours in the global South"

- Please read and share this and take action [see below]
- Please get inspired to organize and work to bring human rights and environmental standards and accountability to your pension funds and investments. Not easy. Our public and private investments are part of the 'achilles heel' to how the global economy often works in unequal, harmful and violent ways – on behalf of the investors!

United Church of Canada Pension Board Defies Will of the Church - Refuses to divest from Goldcorp

November 17, 2016, Tatamagouche/Montreal/Guatemala

- **Contact:** Jackie McVicar, United for Mining Justice, (902) 324-2584, unitedforminingjustice@gmail.com

The Board that controls the pension investments of the United Church of Canada, Canada's largest protestant Christian church, is refusing to put into practice a vote in August 2015 that would see the Church divest from Goldcorp Inc.

This was the third motion presented to the General Council around divestment from the gold mining giant since 2009, when members of the church, through a group called Mining the Connections, acted on a call from community and church partners in Guatemala and El Salvador to do so. While the controversial Marlin Mine is at the heart of the call for divestment, Mining the Connections has also pointed to the lack of consultation and free, prior and informed consent around Goldcorp's Cerro Blanco mine and the violence-ridden Escobal mine, which Goldcorp had a major stake in developing.

"The church has a responsibility to denounce all of the injustices committed by the mining company. We must work to defend life, not make more money. We're convinced that monetary wealth destroys life and for those who want to make more and more, they don't care about how they get it," says Sister Maudilia Lopez from the Parish of San Miguel Ixtahuacan, where the Goldcorp Marlin Mine has been operating since 2005.

She adds, "It's not enough for only us to speak out. We have said so much, but we aren't given credibility. Investors should know the damage their money causes us. If the church believes that their money is doing something good, they're wrong. On the contrary, you are killing us."

Every employee and every body of the United Church that offers employment invests in the United Church of Canada Pension Plan. On August 11, 2015 the General Council, which represents the membership of the church in its broadest sense, voiced that their will was to divest from Goldcorp, with a 78% positive vote on a combined motion that was forwarded to General Council by four conferences from regions across the country.

At a meeting this weekend in Toronto, the Pension Board will give its reasoning to the General Council Executive for not complying with decision made in 2015, based on the recommendation of its Responsible Investment Working Group. Instead, they have pledged to continue shareholder engagement with Goldcorp through SHARE.

Mining the Connections is critical of this decision. "Management engagement by SHARE and other management engagement groups over almost a decade has not changed the devastating impacts. Nor do SHARE and Sustainalytics have the mandate and/or capacity to investigate and address many of the most egregious impacts. In addition, many of the most important Human Rights Assessment recommendations mentioned in the Pension Board Appendix have not been implemented," they write in their response to the decision.

"When you take away from a community all that is life giving and sustaining and then add back the bare essentials for its existence, how can you possibly justify that as a positive contribution?" notes Dave MacPherson, a member of the Mining the Connections committee. "Our church and our society teaches us that we must not turn a blind eye to abuse and yet we continue to enable Canadian mining companies to abuse our neighbours in the global South," he adds.

In its letter to the Pension Board, Mining the Connections also points to the allegations against former Goldcorp Senior Vice President for Central and South America, Eduardo Villacorta, and his connection to a massive corruption and bribery scandal that broke in June 2016 linking illegal campaign funding to government payoffs in Guatemala.

In addition, the group asks the Pension Board to report on how SHARE is holding Goldcorp accountable for its remediation and reclamation plans and its post-closure monitoring program due to the impacts of the Marlin Mine on future generations.

A recent report released by Osgoode Hall Law School's Justice and Accountability Project (JCAP) points to three Goldcorp projects in Latin America where serious human rights violations have been reported in the past 15 years. Murders, kidnappings, disappearances, injuries and arrest warrants issued against members of opposition is detailed at Goldcorp mines in Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala.

"In addition to the long-term impacts caused by violence around the mine, the communities are also suffering from ground and surface water contamination, homes collapsing near the mine and the destruction of sacred site," says Lisa Rankin, Coordinator of the Maritimes-Guatemala Breaking the Silence Network, a partner of the United Church of Canada. "As the company winds down operations and looks to sell off the Marlin asset, communities have expressed concerns about the medium and long-term environmental and social risks."

In their correspondence to the General Council Executive, the Pension Board notes that its fiduciary duty won't allow it to divest from Goldcorp and that its engagement with the company has been more positive in the long run for the communities. They also note that arbitrary divestment from Goldcorp would establish a precedent mandating divestment from other companies groups object to.

"Members of church and union pension plans have huge challenges in holding their pension plans accountable as they have their own governance and are minimally accountable to the plan members," says Kathryn Anderson of Mining the Connections. "Divesting from Goldcorp is hardly opening the floodgates. This was a grassroots process that took us seven years of documentation, communications with partners on the ground and education of our members. Of course people aren't going to present a motion at the General Council meeting, which only happens every three years, unless there is a very strong reason to do so. We aren't talking about individuals writing in, asking for divestment. A General Council motion has been passed. The Pension Board is defying the will of the United Church of Canada with their decision."

The plenary of the General Council Executive is expected to hear the Pension Board's stance on Saturday afternoon. "Churches and other social justice organizations evolved in spite of the law of the day not because of it. I challenge the church to take the moral high ground and divest," says MacPherson.

To read the correspondence between Mining the Connections and the United Church of Canada Pension Board, visit www.unitedforminingjustice.com

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Just a few photos of a few of the harms from over the years



Large fissures have regularly opened in throughout San Miguel Ixtahuacan and Sipakapa, due to use of explosives in over 150kilometers of tunnels.



Repression used against community members protesting.



Community members suffer on-going health harms due to contaminants in air and water.

Take Action

At the request of United Church of Canada members, staff and personnel, an urgent call to action has been put out to the Moderator of the United Church, The Rt. Rev. Jordan Cantwell to urge the Pension Board to respect and act upon the will of the church. There are two ways to respond.

1. Sign the letter [see below]
2. Write a personal message to the Moderator and share on social media.

While we strongly encourage members and anyone with pension funds invested in the United Church of Canada to respond, ANYONE can send a message and sign the letter. Online action here: <http://www.unitedforminingjustice.com/divestment>

Article for People of United Church of Canada, October 2012, after visit to Goldcorp mine site in Guatemala

"I feel confused and betrayed. My teachings are that an apology is not sincere when the one who apologizes continues to do the same thing that was harmful...How is it possible to, on the one hand, to work hard to reconcile with the past of violations against the native people here; and then on the other, consciously and willingly profit from the violations currently being perpetrated on the native people in Guatemala? While in Guatemala, I saw very clearly that the Mayans are indeed our brothers and sisters, with their connection to Mother Earth and their life-giving ceremonies." (Cathy Gerrior, wape'k mikjikj e'pit - white turtle woman. [Read article here: http://halifax.mediacoop.ca/story/people-united-church/13572](http://halifax.mediacoop.ca/story/people-united-church/13572))

The letter

Dear Rt. Rev. Jordan Cantwell, Moderator of the United Church of Canada:

Since 2009, concerned members of the United Church of Canada, including pension holders, have called for the United Church of Canada Pension Board to divest from Goldcorp Inc. On August 11, 2015 the General Council voiced that their will was to divest from Goldcorp, with a 78% positive vote on a combined motion that was forwarded to General Council by four conferences. The will of the Church to divest was based on concerns from our Church's partners in Guatemala and the on-the ground reality they are experiencing.

The majority of the people affected by Goldcorp's operations are indigenous Maya Mam and Maya Sipakapense communities who have courageously spoken out about the serious environmental and social conflicts they have endured since the arrival of the company, despite the grave risks they run for doing so. Their deep concerns about the negative irreversible impacts of Goldcorp's mine in their backyard have been clearly made and the destruction of their inheritance is well documented - contamination of the earth and water; social conflict and violence; destruction of homes and sacred sites.

While we applaud your call for solidarity with the resistance at Standing Rock because of the lack of free, prior and informed consent, we cannot help but note the contradiction between that stance and the Pension Board's refusal to divest from Goldcorp. The communities in Guatemala have repeatedly denounced the violations of their rights and a complaint to the Inter American Human Rights Commission, based on the violation of ILO 169 on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the lack of free, prior and informed consent based on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, yet the Pension Board refuses to take action.

Time and again, United Church partners have told us to stop investing in Goldcorp. For the past seven years, we have acted, building a national grassroots movement in Canada. This isn't a few people on the fringe - the General Council has spoken. Now it's time for the Pension Board to show that it will respect our partners and the will of the majority of the United Church of Canada and publically divest from Goldcorp.

If the decisions of the General Council are not taken seriously and acted upon, is the whole process not a farce, an embarrassment, and a waste of the time and money of the church? After all that has been done over many years towards a position on this issue, it is morally outrageous that this decision of General Council is not honoured.

Respectfully, we ask that you indicate to the General Council Executive and the Pension Board that the Pension Board must respond to the will of the church and divest.

- **Sign the letter:** <http://www.unitedforminingjustice.com/divestment>

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Gold Fever

Award winning film Gold Fever documents how Canadian mining giant Goldcorp Inc. continues to mine relentlessly in San Miguel Ixtahuacan and Sipacapa, Guatemala, despite 13 years of repression, other human rights violations, environmental destruction, corruption and impunity. Gold Fever takes the viewer into the homes and communities of courageous Mayan Mam people resisting the harms and violations, struggling for justice and a different “development” model.

- Trailer / Information: www.goldfevermovie.com/

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