

Rights Action
May 4, 2017

Canadian Ambassador & CSR Counsellor misled Honduran villagers in community environmental defense struggle with Toronto-based Aura Minerals

Browser: <http://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/canadian-ambassador-csr-counsellor-misled-honduran-villagers-in-community-environmental-defense-struggle-with-toronto-based-aura-minerals>

Below: a letter from Honduran villagers to Ambassador Michael Gort (Embassy of Canada in Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua) and Jeffrey Davidson (Counsellor for Extractive Sector Corporate Social Responsibility Counsellor)

Contrary to Counsellor Davidson's misleading public statements, the underlying issues are not resolved. Furthermore, employees of Aura Minerals (and their MINOSA subsidiary) have threatened and carried out acts of repression against local community members; dozens of community members have been "criminalized" for their peaceful opposition to this harmful open-pit, cyanide leaching mine; and tensions are spiking at this very time as Aura Minerals/MINOSA is trying to push ahead with the illegal and unwanted destruction of a 200 year old cemetery, to mine gold in the mountain below.

Support is needed for the community human rights and environmental defenders; pressure is needed to pressure the Canadian government to stop turning a blind eye to the many harms and problems that Aura Minerals is causing.

April 20, 2017

From the Comité Ambientalista de Azacualpa and Patronato de Azacualpa
La Unión, Copan, Honduras

To Ambassador Michael Gort
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Dear Ambassador Michael Gort and CSR Counsellor Jeffrey Davidson,

As the leaders of the Azacualpa Environmental Committee and the elected council (*patronato*) of the community of Azacualpa in the municipality of La Unión, department of Colon, we felt it is extremely important to write you and express the following:

Since our meetings that including the participation of Canadian Ambassador Michael Gort and CSR Counsellor Jeffrey Davidson in Santa Rosa de Copan and Azacualpa on July 29 and 30, 2016, we have not had any official communication with either of your offices regarding our discussions and concerns raised about the on-going conflict between our community and Minerales de Occidente (MINOSA), the Honduran subsidiary of Canadian mining company, Aura Minerals.



Left, Michael Gort; Right: Jeffrey Davidson – meeting with members of the Azacualpa Environmental Committee and Patronato.

Since this meeting, we are concerned to learn that Mr. Jeffrey Davidson has made statements reported in the Canadian media outlet The Hill Times and that he *“personally helped to facilitate a peaceful resolution to a dispute between Toronto-based Aura Minerals and the community of Azacualpa over the expansion of a mine in Honduras.”* The same article reported that *“following his visit, and with help from Honduras’ national human rights commissioner, the mine and community returned to negotiations, reaching an agreement in August to move the cemetery.”*

These statements are particularly concerning to us because they suggest that a successful solution to the conflict between Aura Minerals/MINOSA and our community has been achieved despite the fact that neither the Canadian Embassy in Tegucigalpa or the Office of the CSR Counsellor have contacted us since their visit in July 2016 to monitor fulfillment of the resolution and agreement they allegedly helped to reach.

In response to the above public statements, the community *patronato* and Environmental Committee published a declaration on November 9, 2016 expressing this concern and stating that: “we are given the impression that no advocacy actions in favour of the Community were carried out before the Government of Canada.”

In fact, all the concerns expressed to both Canadian officials, continue today and the community finds itself facing further conflict and violations by MINOSA/Aura Minerals with total complicity of the Honduran government including the Office of the Commission for Human Rights (CONADEH). Publicly claiming their role in the “resolution” to the conflict also implies that the CSR Counsellor bears responsibility to the failure of MINOSA/Aura Minerals to act responsibly and fulfill their commitments under the 2016 agreement.

Both Ambassador Gort and CSR Counsellor Davidson and their offices have been notified by ourselves and our Canadian allies of the context of the conflict including the criminalization of 25 community members by the state of Honduras in relation to protests about the displacement of our cemetery; divisive strategies utilized by the mining company to apply pressure to community structures; and the lack of due process including land expropriation procedures and free, prior and informed community consultation.

Since a “resolution” was reached on August 11, 2016, the leaders in Azacualpa have publicly reported the continuation of conflict including failures of both the mining company and the Honduran government in fulfilling their commitments made under the agreement. A summary of these include:

Little interest and attention by municipal and national authorities including the Governor of the Department of Copan and CONADEH, to discuss and follow through on the conditions outlined in the August 2016 agreement by the Fulfillment, Evaluation and Follow-up Group (*Mesa de Cumplimiento, Evaluación y Seguimiento*). For example, municipal authorities fail to provide adequate and consistent locations for meetings between all signatories to the agreement.

MINOSA/Aura Minerals is threatening to carry out a pilot exhumation plan in the Azacualpa cemetery without fulfilling various clauses of the 2016 agreement. MINOSA/Aura Minerals is repeating similar behaviour that provoked the peaceful community protests in 2014, after the signing of the 2012 agreement.

The Azacualpa *patronato* and Environmental Committee notified the Director General of the Honduran Institute of Geology and Mining (INHGEOMIN) on March 2, 2017 of these failures and manipulation by MINOSA/Aura Minerals, which include:

Pressure on the Azacualpa leaders by the mining company, the Ministry of Health, and the Governor of Copan, to sign a health decree (*Reglamento de Salud*) written by the Ministry of Health, which would be sent to the Congress to be approved and thus establish a legal mechanism that would permit the displacement of the cemetery.

In the agreement signed in August 2016, it was agreed upon that the company would grant 396 lots no later than April 11, 2017. Nevertheless, MINOSA/Aura Minerals arrived to the community on March 22 with the Military Police, the Governor of Copan, CONADEH, a representative of INHGEOMIN, and the media, to carry out a lottery for only a part of the lots. The community had agreed to a lottery that included all lots and thus, they refused to accept that the lottery be carried out.

And,

Failure to make weekly payments to the beneficiaries outlined in the agreement

Failure to provide scholarships, salaries for community nurses, and housing improvements for the community as outlined in 2016 agreement.

Failure to provide employment for men and women from our community.

We, again, denounce the manipulative strategies being used by the mining company with the intention to divide our community.

In summary, MINOSA/Aura Minerals with full complicity of the Honduran government continues to violate the basic rights of our community and more specifically, the 2016 agreement.

We understand that the Office of the CSR Counsellor will be publishing a report outlining the Counsellor's trip to Honduras, which would include the visit to our community. We write to both the Canadian Ambassador Gort and CSR Counsellor Davidson to respectfully request a copy of the draft of the report before it will be published.

We have also enclosed copies of all our public declarations and communiqués since meeting with the Ambassador and CSR Counsellor in July 2016.

We thank you for your attention to this matter. Please facilitate all communication to us to the following email address: ramirolara@asonog.hn.

Sincerely,

The Azacualpa Community Council (*Patronato*) and the Azacualpa Environmental Committee
Azacualpa, La Union, Copan, Honduras

Signatures from the *Patronato*:

Orlando Rodriguez

Anibal Yuvan Miranda

Henri Mendez

Juan Carlos Lopez

Flori Villanueva

Francis Ramirez

Hector Antonio Trigueros

Signatures from the Environmental Committee:

Miguel Angel Lopez
Genaro Rodriguez
Floresmira Lopez
Lucinda Rodriguez
Melvin Alexis Rivera
Manuel Pesquera

Honduran NGOs and allies:
Jose Ramon Avila, ASONOG
Hedme Castro, ACI Participa

CC:

Canada and the US: Jennifer Moore and Jamie Kneen, MiningWatch Canada jen@miningwatch.ca, jamie@miningwatch.ca ; Grahame Russell, Rights Action, info@rightsaction.org; Karen Spring, Honduras Solidarity Network, spring.kj@gmail.com; *Isabelle* Solon Helal, Governance Specialist, Natural Resources and Governance Division, isabelle.solonhelal@international.gc.ca; Office of the Primer Minister of Canada pm@pm.gc.ca; Jason Smith, Human Rights and Labor Representative, US Embassy in Tegucigalpa, SmithJA6@state.gov;
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Background

Mining in a State of Impunity: Coerced Negotiations and Forced Displacement by Aura Minerals in Western Honduras, by Karen Spring, published by Mining Watch and Honduras Solidarity Network: <http://miningwatch.ca/publications/2016/6/29/mining-state-impunity-coerced-negotiations-and-forced-displacement-aura>

Aura Minerals Set To Start Destruction of 200 Year Old Cemetery In Honduras: <http://us9.campaign-archive1.com/?u=ea011209a243050dfb66dff59&id=d3523d3fc2>)

Write to

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Member Parliament

<http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Parlinfo/Compilations/HouseOfCommons/MemberByPostalCode.aspx?Menu=HOC>

Canadian Embassy Honduras

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More information

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Jen Moore, Mining Watch, jen@miningwatch.ca

Grahame Russell, Rights Action, grahame@rightsaction.org

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