

## **Risk of mining repression in Guatemala**

### **Mayan Q'eqchi' fishermen and campesinos peacefully blocked access for 12 days to CGN nickel mine in Guatemala, formerly owned by Hudbay Minerals, now by Solway Group**

Day #3: [#CDNMiningImpunity](#) book project & research trip, headed by Professor Catherine Nolin (UNBC Geography) and Grahame Russell (Rights Action)

(View in browser: <http://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/risk-of-mining-repression-in-guatemala-mayan-qeqchi-fishermen-and-campesinos-peacefully-blocked-access-for-12-days-to-cgn-nickel-mine>)



(CGN/ Solway Group's open-pit nickel mine, in El Estor, on the north shore of Lake Izabal. Photo, May 16, 2017, by a person who does not want their name published for fear of repression.)

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## **Nickel Mine GET OUT!**

From May 3-14, 2017, Q'eqchi' fishermen and campesinos peacefully blocked the road to CGN's nickel mine in El Estor, Izabal, shutting down the mining operation for 12 days. They lifted the blockade on May 14, to give the government and company a chance to comply with their demands ...

*“They are demanding the presence of the Minister of the Environment and Natural Resources, who should order an impartial investigation about the origins of Lake Izabal’s contamination. Later they will demand the presence of the Ministers of Labor and of Energy and Mines to permanently shut down CGN’s mining operation.”*

Few expect the government and company to shut this harmful operation down. Most suspect they will have to take peaceful action themselves, to protect their mountains, lands and waters from on-going harm and degradation. Many fear, the government will respond with a heavy military and police process, in defense of the interests of the global mining industry, and carry out repression and criminalization of local Q’eqchi’ community and environmental defenders.

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### **Day 8 statement**

**“Peaceful blockade of the highway in El Estor, in defense of Lake Izabal, cradle of Manatees, and in defense of Mother Earth**

**KOLB’AL RIX LIPALAW, ROCHOOH WAKAX HA’ UT XSASAL RUK’ANA’ CHO’CH**

The Q’eqchi’ people of El Estor have been blocking the highway in El Estor since May 3, 2017, in a peaceful protest against an endless list of violations and harms caused by the Guatemalan Nickel Company –CGN-, property of the Russian Solway Group company.

The Q’eqchi’ people say enough – stop harming Lake Izabal, the territories, and the wellbeing of Q’eqchi’s.

This form of abusive extraction continues to play an important role in the global capitalist economy, especially for the companies and investors from dominant, wealthy countries. These transnational companies have a global presence and are extracting large amounts of capital from indigenous lands, using state and private forces to repress and displace native communities throughout Guatemala and Central America. Their mining operations lead to armed conflict, contamination, assassinations, rape, torture and the imprisonment of union leaders and activists.



Former General (and alleged war criminal) Otto Perez Molina, former president now imprisoned for leading the “La Linea” organized crime group, officially inaugurated the CGN mining operation in 2014.

Indigenous peoples are treated mostly like physical obstacles that hinder “development”, who hinder the extraction of these capital generating resources. The transnational companies commonly attempt to eliminate “the problem” through violence, assimilation, criminalization and other genocidal measures. Our brothers and sisters are also used as a source of exploitable labor.

That has been the bitter history in the region of El Estor, Izabal. The 1970s up to 2011 brought us the aggressive history of Canadian mining companies: INCO/Exmibal and later Hudbay Minerals/CGN; and since 2011, we have the same story with the Solway Group/CGN.

- In 2012, 3 students from Universidad del Valle were murdered in the CGN/Solway Group mine while participating in a formal exchange program between this university and the CGN. These crimes have not yet been resolved;
- The criminal trial continues against Hudbay Minerals/ CGN’s former head of security, ex-colonel Mynor Padilla, for the murder of the teacher Adolfo Ich, and the attack that left German Chub paralyzed, as well as the attack against another six Las Nubes community members;
- Lawsuits against Hudbay Minerals and the CGN continue in Canada for the rape of 11 women in 2007, and the crimes against Adolfo Ich and German Chub.

The peaceful protest blocking the highway in El Estor, Izabal department, is a movement against the pillage of ancestral lands and the destruction of Lake Izabal. The Artisanal Fishermen Guild (GPA) of the Q’eqchi’ indigenous peoples of El Estor are tired of having their rights violated and their lands exploited.

May 3, 2017 showed itself to be the day to recover the self-determination of the Q’eqchi’ fishermen and all indigenous peoples. The presence of the transnational companies CGN, PRONICO and Naturaceites are destroying the only natural resources and the only dignified jobs for these fishermen.

Prior to the arrival of these transnational companies, Lake Izabal was crystal clear, generous and sustainable, generating healthy food, work and pleasure. Now the contamination is evident in the riverbanks and the dead fish.

The contamination of Lake Izabal is of great concern for the people of El Estor and for the future of generations to come. The elderly who have lived by fishing, passing on the knowledge of fishing to their children, are greatly concerned with the loss of this knowledge.

Today is the 8th day of the resistance of the conscientious and hardworking artisanal fisherman who are indefinitely blocking the route to Alta Verapaz in El Estor, department of Izabal. They are not trying show themselves as leaders, they are not trying to incite the violence they are tired of, they only want the common good, which is the state's duty, seeking to ensure the rescue and protection of their own natural resources against the inefficient actions of the ministries in charge of these aspects. They demand their rights to survival, by fishing and enjoying Lake Izabal.

Presently, they demand the presence of the Minister of the Environment and Natural Resources, who should order an impartial investigation about the origins of Lake Izabal's contamination. Later they will demand the presence of the Ministers of Labor and of Energy and Mines to permanently shut down CGN's mining operation.

Sólo hace falta que solicites solidaridad a unirse a la resistencia ...

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### **Fishermen block access to the mining company in El Estor, Izabal**

<http://www.prensalibre.com/ciudades/izabal/pescadores-realizan-bloqueos-en-el-estor-izabal>

By Dony Stewart, May 13, 2017

Artisanal fishermen from El Estor, Izabal, continue their demonstrations and road blockades for the twelfth consecutive day, protesting the contamination of Lake Izabal, that they believe to be caused by the mining company that operates in the area.

The fishers indicate that their protests are peaceful and that authorities have only halfheartedly tried to dialogue, offering the same thing they always offer without giving a concrete response to their demands.

Eduardo Bim from the Artisanal Fishermen's Guild (GPA in Spanish) said that they have denounced the contamination in the lake several times but their requests to investigate the origin of the contamination have been ignored, reason for which they are blocking the entrance to the CGN-PRONICO plant in El Estor.

The protesters also block the entrance to the community where the company's workers live, and do not allow vehicles that transport mining materials to travel to the PAHAME company in Santo Tomas de Castilla.

Bim added that it has not been possible to establish a sustainable dialogue because authorities fail to listen to their demands. "We are fishermen and we know how to use natural resources, and we want to defend our lake; instead of supporting the people, the authorities have taken distance and fled; we want peace but we also want to defend our natural resources."

Community member Claudia Marina Chen affirms that the water coming down to the lake from the hills is of a red color. "There is no more drinkable water and we don't have the money to purchase it, it's sad how they are finishing off our natural resources and authorities don't do anything to stop it" she noted.

The company's version

Delegates from the CGN-PRONICO mining company [previously owned by Hudbay Minerals, now by the Solway Group] indicated that they work within the framework of the law and respect all norms. They assured that the blockages have caused them substantial loss, in addition to taking away the freedom of hundreds of their collaborators.

Mynor Alvarez, Manager of Community Relations of the mining company, expressed that in reiterated occasions they participated in dialogues in which they gave their support to community members, therefore they don't understand how there could be blockades against the company now, since there has always been an open relationship with the community. Alvarez also claimed that El Estor has benefited from 200 jobs, while another 600 people have received indirect benefits from investment in their shops.

In regard to the impediment to travel affecting mining workers, Alvarez explained that the company requested the necessary support from authorities, since the family members of the collaborators have been trapped in the community where they live and protesters are denying access to restock food supplies, which is very worrisome, especially for the children living there.

"We hope that dialogue is possible. As a company we don't have any influence on the lake, we have carried out analyses and studies of the water that have been shared with authorities so that they can determine the origin of this occasional change in color in some areas, and we are willing to dialogue" he added.

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### **"Mining Impunity in the Aftermath of Guatemala's Genocide: The Violence of Contemporary Predatory Mineral Exploitation"**

Catherine Nolin and Grahame Russell are in Guatemala – along with photo-journalist James Rodriguez and journalist Sandra Cuffe - carrying out final interviews for a forthcoming book "Mining Impunity in the Aftermath of Guatemala's Genocide: The Violence of Contemporary Predatory Mineral Exploitation", (provisional title), to be published in late 2017, early 2018.

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