

No to Aura Minerals Destruction of Azacualpa Cemetery

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/no-to-aura-minerals-destruction-of-azacualpa-cemetery>

"We are tired, beaten down, hungry and cold, but we will continue to fight until the end, and if I die, I want to be buried in the cemetery." (Don Manuelito Rodriguez)



A young woman from Azacualpa, Honduras attempts to stop a tractor working for Canadian company Aura Minerals and MINOSA (its subsidiary in Honduras), operating an open-pit, mountain top removal mine, getting ever closer to the 200-year-old cemetery in the Azacualpa community.

According to locals, this cemetery has been around for more than 200 years, with 2000 bodies buried in it. By May 10, 2018, Aura minerals/MINOSA had dug up 121 of these buried bodies – family members challenging the legality of these exhumations. The Azacualpa community continues to defend its cemetery, environment and well-being against the threats, corruption and greed of Aura Minerals/MINOSA.

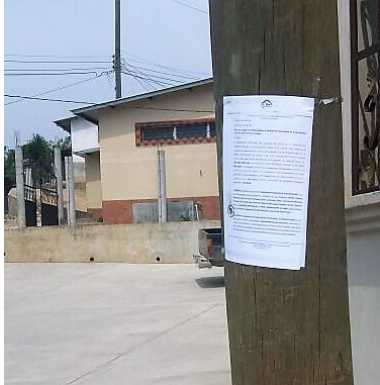


This is a summary of recent events of the struggle led by the people of Azacualpa, and other communities from the municipality of La Union, department of Copan. Rights Action is not publishing the names of

the people providing this information and photos, as many are receiving threats from people affiliated with Aura Minerals/MINOSA.

May 5, 2018

Court order: Suspend mining



In early May 2018, a court in San Pedro Sula ordered Aura Minerals/MINOSA to suspend the exhumations of, digging up of bodies from the Azacualpa cemetery. The inhabitants of Azacualpa pasted copies of this court order on lamp posts throughout the area.

Since May 27, 2018

This is a summary of what is happening in Azacualpa in regard to the exhumations of bodies and attempted gold mining exploitation of the cemetery. Since May 27 of this year, a group of community members have remained on the hill of the cemetery, impeding Aura Minerals/MINOSA from carrying out exhumations and mining.

On July 10, 2018, a group of Aura Minerals/MINOSA contractors and employees came to the area at 8:30am, threatening to evict community members. A notification was sent to the State Protective Mechanism, which immediately ordered CONADEH [National Human Rights Commissioner] to send observers immediately and ordered the National Police to come to the area immediately.

CONADEH did not show up. The National Police deployed a patrol car to the area to calm the situation. There were critical moments of tension. The police presence was criticized because four more patrol cars arrived to threaten to evict the people defending the cemetery. Both groups were present there, and we ask: why are they threatening to evict those who are defending their rights, their land, their cemetery, their environment? These people were only sitting there on the ground, without any type of provocation.

Finally, the police just made verbal threats. Around 5:00pm, a police officer stated that there would not be an eviction, and that on July 11 a lawyer from the Attorney General's office in Santa Rosa de Copan would receive them to find out what they want.

7/11/2018

Exhumation of the dead

On July 11, community representatives that opposes the exploitation of the cemetery went to a meeting with lawyer Coritza Vega, coordinator of the Attorney General's office in Santa Rosa, Copan. Coritza invited them to listen to their petitions. CONADEH, the National Police, the Attorney General's office for protection of children and the public defender also participated in this meeting. Coritza committed to the following: in Tegucigalpa she will request the investigation of the issue by the Office of the Prosecution

for Human Rights, the Office of the Prosecution for the Environment, and the Office of the Prosecution for Anthropology.

It appeared to community representatives that government and judicial officials did not have a clear understanding of the problems: they do not know the future consequences of acid drainage caused by open pit, cyanide leaching gold mining; they do not understand the health and psycho-social problems it is causing; they were surprised about the cases of illegally digging up (exhuming) the remains of people's loved ones. They acted attentive and receptive to these issues, and with certain willingness to investigate it.



People paid by Aura Minerals/MINOSA, illegally exhuming the first group of corpses ...

7/13/2018

Threats by Aura Minerals/MINOSA

Due to the threats made by Aura Minerals/MINOSA contractors and employees to evict the people safeguarding the hill of the Azacualpa Cemetery, there was a request for the presence of the Protective Mechanism in order to avoid any confrontation. This helped lower the intensity of the conflict.

7/18/2018

Contractors and employees of Aura Minerals/MINOSA and their families, with the support of the La Union municipality, blocked the highway in the Cucuyagua area. They demanded: the eviction of the protesters at the Azacualpa Cemetery; to annul the court order suspending the exhumations; and demanding removal of the "ASONOG" NGO from the community.

Judge their requests yourself ...



Floresmira Lopez shares her experience struggling against Aura Minerals/MINOSA which had illegally exhumed her father's body. With a club in hand, she forced the gravediggers to return him to his tomb.

Dividing the community

Jose Angel Lopez expresses how Aura Minerals/MINOSA divided the community; they are exhuming their family members without the family's authorization. We will continue struggling against this until the end, he said.

7/20/2018

Yesterday, once again, Aura Minerals/MINOSA contractors and employees and their families announced that today (Friday, July 20) they would come to forcibly remove the protesters, whatever it takes. Things got worse when mayor Hugo Alvarado promised he would support the eviction of those who “oppose development.”

Faced with this renewed threat, the government was advised and ... then soldiers and police showed up, ... But this time the pro-mine people, who had made the threats, did not come.

7/25/2018

Second court order against Aura Minerals/MINOSA

The Contentious Court of San Pedro Sula issued a second order in favor of community members from Azacualpa, Ceibita and El Cedro in La Union, this time the municipal government of La Union to enforce the immediate cessation of the exhumations (currently suspended). Signed by 36 people from the aforementioned communities, this motion had been presented to the court in San Pedro Sula on June 22, 2018, to oppose the exhumation of their loved ones without their consent, as Aura Minerals/MINOSA has been carrying out with the complicity of the Secretary of Public Health and the Municipality of La Union.

This court order reinforces the previous order issued on May 8, 2018 which led to the initial suspension.

Summary of the Azacualpa struggle

The mayor of La Union, together with representatives of Aura Minerals/MINOSA, were in the city of Tegucigalpa and met with: the Commission on Mining, the Secretary of the Interior and Decentralization, the Ministry of Work, the Ministry of Security and whomever else they could. They invaded the media with their perspective. People in the community were alert and tense.

Yesterday and today, the mayor of La Union and Aura Minerals/MINOSA employees were pressuring the Attorney General's office of Santa Rosa de Copan to order the eviction of the protesters. The AG lawyer Coritza Vega behaved with dignity and has not given in to their pressure.

The head of security of Aura Minerals/MINOSA made this offer to the lawyer Coritza: "If she wants we can capture the protesters and give them to her in the city to put them on trial". She rejected this.



Honduran police and Aura Minerals/MINOSA security guards operating together.

This afternoon there was a meeting in the home of the president of the community leadership, Orlando Rodriguez, supposedly to celebrate a pending eviction order - there were fireworks, cake, drinks and everything to celebrate, they thought, ... but no. So they ate the food but couldn't light the fireworks.

The threat of eviction by Aura Minerals/MINOSA contractors and employees persists against the defenders of the cemetery, the community and the environment. Yesterday they confronted the Attorney General's office, saying that if the AG's office does not order the eviction in 48 hours, they (Aura Minerals/MINOSA workers) will do it. It is important to be attentive to any incident that may occur with the families that are resisting exploitation.

7/31/2018

Today, people from the Azacualpa community were cleaning their cemetery.



Tomorrow, the priest from the local parish will visit, with the possibility of celebrating Mass there.



Things are relatively calm despite mayor Hugo Alvarado's public statements that today or tomorrow, he would carry out the eviction if the corresponding authorities fail to do so.

7/31/2018

Despite the court suspension orders, Aura Minerals/MINOSA continues to mine all around the ever more isolated cemetery. Aura Minerals/MINOSA has said that the mine is not functioning, yet the company works 24 hours a day, without stopping for a minute. This image was taken on July 31, 2018, from the hill of the cemetery.



8/5/2018

Physical attacks among neighbors

Yesterday, August 5, 2018, at 5:00pm, Mr. Orlin Villanueva used a machete to attack one of the young people who oppose the mining of the hill of the cemetery. Both wound up with severe injuries. This is the atmosphere generated by Aura Minerals/MINOSA.

8/27/2018

3 months of courage and dignity

This is the three month anniversary of the day that members of the Azacualpa community decided to camp out permanently on the hill of the cemetery to impede Aura Minerals/MINOSA from destroying it.

So many things have happened! Community members have been pressured in many ways; they have been mocked; they have suffered bodily harm; they have suffered all kinds of aggressions, with people destroying the very shacks where they were huddled, and hurling things at them to make them leave.

But they carry forth with their spirit of struggle, their principles and values, and their dignity within, and that cannot be destroyed. Of course they are affected by all of these things, but I have seen men and women rise up again, and raise their voices of dignity.



On August 31, 2018, Aura Minerals/MINOSA employees cut hundreds of pine trees, just down the mountain side from the community of Azacualpa itself, even though they did not have a deforestation permit.

Pending destruction of the village of Azacualpa

Not only do most community members want the destruction of their cemetery to stop, but they know that Aura Minerals wants not only the gold under the cemetery, but also on the other side of the cemetery, up the mountain ridge, including –a few kilometers away– the village of Azacualpa. The people of Azacualpa are not just fighting so that the dead can rest in peace ...

All these years later, the struggle continues, even when the local government, the national government and its security forces and Aura Minerals/MINOSA are working together.

Until when? I don't know. But last Saturday, Mr. Manuelito Rodriguez said: "we are tired, beaten down, hungry and cold, but we will continue to fight until the end, and if I die, I want to be buried in the cemetery".

For Honduras, the struggle must continue.

Support needed

Since 2014, Rights Action has supported the Azacualpa Environmental Committee and their environmental, community, human rights and cemetery defense work. (To donate: see below)

Write/Contact

Call on Canadian authorities to support the Azacualpa community calls for a stop to the exhumations of their dead, and a suspension of all mining expansion. Contact your Member of Parliament and pressure them to write to make write the above offices as well: <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members>

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