

When will the Canadian and U.S. governments and media stop censoring the fundamental lack of democracy, the corrupted rule of law, the exploitation, repression and impunity in Honduras, all enabled by the Honduran regime, a strong ally of the U.S. and Canada?

Honduras Catholic Church to Aura Minerals & all mining companies: “GET OUT OF OUR TERRITORY”

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/honduras-catholic-church-to-aura-minerals-all-mining-companies-get-out-of-our-territory>

- **Below:** Statement by Bishop & Diocese of Santa Rosa de Copán (Honduras), saying ‘No’ to Aura Minerals destruction of Azacualpa cemetery, ‘No’ to Aura’s cyanide-leaching, open-pit mining



(L: bones of bodies illegally exhumed by Aura Minerals, left lying around in Azacualpa cemetery. R: local citizen stares in one of over 100 graves emptied out. Photos: Azacualpa environmental committee)

Media reports (from desecrated Azacualpa cemetery)

- HispanTV report (2 minutes): Threats and criminalizations against local citizens opposing illegal exhumation (digging up) of their loved ones and destruction of 200 year-old Azacualpa cemetery: <https://www.facebook.com/440401536363091/videos/104330350502177/>
- Video images (1 minute): Graves illegally exhumed (emptied out) by Aura Minerals (Canadian/U.S.) gold mining company: <https://www.facebook.com/gilda.silvestrucci/videos/10215091852222483/>
- TeleSUR report (2 minutes): Aura Minerals –& MINOSA subsidiary– use threats, repression, criminalizations and corruption to try and continue exhuming [digging up] hundreds of bodies from the 200 year-old Azacualpa cemetery, so as to continue open-pit, cyanide leaching mining the entire mountain range: <https://www.facebook.com/hedme.castro/videos/2070877152964914/>

“We demand of Aura/MINOSA and ALL the mining companies, the closure of all operations and their DEPARTURE”

Statement of Diocese of Santa Rosa de Copán, Honduras, September 1, 2018

The Diocese of Santa Rosa de Copán, Ecclesiastical Province of Honduras, commits to accompany the community of Azacualpa in the mining conflicts with Aura Minerals, a Canadian/U.S. company.

“The time has come ... when the dead are judged; the time to recompense your servants, the prophets, the holy ones, and those who fear your name, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.” (Revelation 11:18)

The Bishop and the priests [presbiterio] hear the cry of the community of Azacualpa (La Unión, Copán): No to the exploitation of the gold deposit in the Cerro el Cementerio [Cemetery Hill].

1. Since May 27, 2018, more than three months ago, families of the community of Azacualpa are heroically resisting - "without selling themselves to spurious local or international interests" (LS 38), defending "Cemetery Hill" [Cerro el Cementerio] against the ambitions and actions of the Aura Minerals mining company of Canada/U.S., operated by its subsidiary Minerales de Occidente (MINOSA).

2. This conflict is added to many years of struggle against the exploitation and destruction of the environment, which continues generating divisions, intimidations, threats and prosecutions.

But, as the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* [of Pope Francis] affirms: “In every discussion about a proposed venture, a series of questions need to be asked in order to discern if it will contribute to genuine integral development: For what [purpose]? Why? Where? When? How? For whom? What are the risks? What are the costs? Who will pay those costs and how? In this examination, some questions must have higher priority.” (LS 185)

3. The families of the community of Azacualpa declare their principal concerns:

3.1. NO TO THE EXHUMATION AND MOVING OF THE TOMBS OF THE FAITHFUL (“las sepulturas de los fieles”)

Because Aura/MINOSA are actively trying to have the families cede and accept money in exchange for the exhumation and moving of the bodies of their beloved.

3.2. PROTECTION OF AND RESPECT FOR “CERRO EL CEMENTERIO,” AN HISTORICAL CULTURAL AND SACRED HERITAGE

Currently the mine is only 30 to 50 meters from the cemetery, violating the limits which their license establishes, which indicates that it ought to be 200 meters distant. Also, they raise the fear that Aura/MINOSA will buy and obtain licenses to exploit the whole of Cerro el Cementerio completely, destroying buildings and obstructing the lives of the people and the environment.

In the case of the cemetery, which, because of its antiquity is a historical heritage of the community of Azacualpa, Article 54, letter ‘d’ of the General Mining Law (Decree no. 238-2912) ought to be applied. This says: “To suspend immediately all mining activities and give notice when in the area of exploration and exploitation, [one] encounters the presence of vestiges of the cultural heritage of the country, so

that the competent authorities may proceed to the delimitation of that area which will remain excluded from mining activity.”

Also, the general principle of Article 5 of the General Law of the Environment (Decree no, 104-93) on the Environmental Impact Evaluation and the fulfillment of measures to protect the environment and the historical cultural heritage should be taken into account.

3.3. THE NONFULFILLMENT OF STANDING LAWS OF THE COUNTRY AND THE FAILURE TO GUARANTEE THE PROTECTION OF LIFE (soil, air, flora and fauna) AND THE HEALTH OF THE HUMAN PERSON (cfr. Art, 54.a. of the General Mining Law)

The mining company's abuses of power consists in direct actions which violate the right to: property, life, freedom of movement and residency, a healthy environment, minorities, counting on appropriate mechanisms of negotiation, to hold assemblies or meetings, to enjoy and make use of their natural resources, health, with the following problems which originate from the mining industry, for example: pains in the lower extremities, problems of dreams and nightmares which cause anxiety and sadness, headaches, respiratory problems, skin rashes, hair loss, vision problems, strange types of cancer, etc.

Our STANCE AND COMMITMENT AS PASTORS

4. The Diocesan Bishop and Presbytery of the Diocese of Santa Rosa de Copán “freely exercises his powers and function in sacred place [Churches and Cemeteries]” (c.1213; cfr. c. 1205 [The Code of Canon Law], because as the ecclesiastical authority he ought to “protect and highlight their sacred character (c. 1243).

He can speak his word of advice or denunciation, if necessary, as pastor of the Catholic community, because it is a question of “the burial of the faithful” (c. 1205).

This deposit of gold found in the cemetery of the community of Azacualpa, since it is located in a “SACRED PLACE,” does not give to any institution or local community the right to be able to extract from the terrain for its exploitation, only if the holiness of the place is lost, that is, “if they have been in great measure destroyed or if they are permanently reduced to secular uses by the decree of the Ordinary [the Bishop of the diocese] or as a matter of fact” (c. 1212).

Therefore, we DECLARE OUR SOLIDARITY AND SUPPORT of the community of Azacualpa in their struggle to defend the environment and human life in the face of the destruction and continuing threats of the company Aura/MINOSA, and to “ALL” the mining companies we demand the closure of all operations (Exploration, Exploitation, and Processing) and their DEPARTURE from Copán and from the other departments of our diocese (Santa Barbara, Lempira, Ocotepeque, and Intibucá).

THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING [MAGISTERIUM] on the care of “our sister mother earth.”

5. Pope Francis, since 2015 makes a “CALL” to the human family and, therefore, to the local Church of Santa Rosa de Copán: “the urgent challenge of protecting our common home includes a concern to unite the whole human family in the search for a sustainable and integral development, since we know that things can change.... I want to recognize, encourage, and thank all those who ... are working to guarantee the protection of the home which we share. . Special gratitude is owed to those who vigorously struggle to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world's poorest.” (LS 13)

6. In the commitment and ability to work together to “construct our common home” among us, “we need a conversation that brings all of us together, because the environmental challenge we are living and its human roots concern and impact all of us.... We need a new universal solidarity.... All of us can collaborate as God’s instruments for the care of creation, each one from their culture, experiences, initiatives, and abilities” (LS 14).

7. In Honduras and in all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, “financial institutions and multinational companies are becoming stronger to the point that local economies are subordinated, above all weakening the local States, which seem ever more powerless to carry out development projects at the service of their populations... International extractive industries and agribusiness often do not respect the economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights of the local populations, and do not assume their responsibilities.” (Aparecida Document, 66)

8. Echoing the Document from Aparecida (no, 66) of 2007, the Encyclical LAUDATO SI’ of 2015 invites us to “acknowledge the sins against creation: ‘that human beings destroy the biological diversity of God’s creation; that human beings degrade the integrity of the earth and contribute to climate change, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; that human beings contaminate the earth’s waters, soil, and air. All these are sins.’ For “to commit a crime against nature is a crime against ourselves and a sin against God” (LS 8)

9. In the face of these “risks to the environment,” “the situation demands that decisions must be made based on a comparison of the hypothetical risks and benefits that each possible alternative decision entails”. (LS 184)

10. In the course of the World Ecological Movement and in the Diocesan Environmental Crisis, according to the Christian conscience, we need a “New Diocesan Solidarity”; because “the work of international agencies and civil society organizations is praiseworthy – those which raise public awareness to these issues and cooperate critically, also employing legitimate means of pressure to ensure that each government carries out its own duty, which it ought not delegate to others, to preserve its country’s environment and natural resources, without capitulating to spurious local or international interests. (LS 38)

11. But we are conscious that environmental policies cannot be modified every time there is a change of government; also, “the enforcement of law is at times inadequate due to corruption” (LS 179). Therefore, “continuity is indispensable”. “For politicians to assume these responsibilities and the costs they entail, this does not fit with the logic of efficiency and short term results of present-day economics and politics. But if they dare to do this, they will again recognize their God-given dignity as humans and leave behind in history a testimony of generous responsibility (LS 181).

12. Finally there are lines of action in the church teaching [Magisterio], in which “Political activity on the local level could also be directed to modifying consumption, to developing an economy of waste disposal and recycling, to protecting certain species, and to planning a diversified agriculture with crop rotation.

It is possible to encourage the improvement of agriculture in poor regions can be improved through investment in rural infrastructures, in the organization of local or national markets, in systems of irrigation, and in the development of sustainable agricultural techniques. One can provide [facilitar]

forms of cooperation and community organization that defend the interests of small producers and preserve local ecosystems from destruction. There is much that can be done!” (LS 180)

Demands for Political Institutions and Actions of the Presbytery and Parishes

13. The position of the diocese against mining: GET OUT OF AZACUALPA AND OUT OF THE DIOCESE!

14. Demands to the State of Honduras: THE LEGISLATIVE, EJECUTIVE, AND JUDICIAL POWER[S]

14.1. TO THE NATIONAL CONGRESS

14.1.1 Revise and reform the Mining Law in accord with the interests of the State and of the local Communities which possess mineral resources, including the following themes:

14.1.1.1. No to open pit [cielo abierto] mining exploitation.

14.1.1.2. No to the use of cyanide and other chemical substances which contaminate and destroy Human Life and the Environment.

14.1.1.3. Obligatory and binding consultation with the communities with natural resources (minerals).

14.1.1.4. Reparation [reparación] for the damages to the environment and health.

14.1.2. Study and fulfill the Law of Mining, Communities, People, and Government.

14.2. TO THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

14.2.1. Urge the revision and reform of the Mining Law, without bias.

14.2.2. Promote the Common Good and the integral and sustainable development of the peoples.

14.2.3. Respect sovereignty and the people’s will.

14.2.4. Efficient service of the governmental institutions involved with the mining industry. (STSS [Secretaría de Trabajo y Seguridad Social/Ministry of Labor and Social Security], INHGEOMIN [INSTITUTO HONDUREÑO DE GEOLOGÍA Y MINAS/Honduran Institute of Geology and Mines], SAR [Servicio de Administración de Rentas/Service of the Administration of Revenues], Salud [Ministry of Health], MIAMBIENTE [La Secretaría de Energía, Recursos Naturales, Ambiente y Minas/Ministry of Energy, Natural Resources, the Environment, and Mines, SANAA [Servicio Autónomo Nacional de Acueductos y Alcantarillados/National Autonomous Service of Water and Sewage Systems], ICF [Instituto de Conservación Forestal/Institute for Conservation of Forests], IHAH [Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia/Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History], SEDIS [La Secretaría de Desarrollo e Inclusión Social/Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion], COPECO [Comisión Permanente de Contingencias/Permanent Emergencies Commission].

14.2.5. Publish all the requests for concessions of exploration, exploitation, and processing so that the peoples and the communities may exercise their sovereignty.

14.3. TO THE SUPREME COURT OF JUSTICE

14.3.1. Impartial application of the General Mining Law.

14.3.2. Sanction the true violators [of the law]

14.3.3. Assure that the Law is enforced and respected by the various social actors (State of Law)

14.4. TO THE MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT[S]

14.4.1. Promote the Common Good and the integral development of the communities.

14.4.2. Apply the municipal laws according to the “agreements of the neighboring peoples [poblaciones].”

14.4.3. No to complicity with the Mining Companies.

14.4.4. Promote and respect the organization of the people in defense of their rights.

14.5. TO THE MINING COMPANIES

14.5.1. We make you an urgent and radical petition: GET OUT OF OUR TERRITORY!

14.5.2. Do not exploit or rob our natural resources.

14.5.3. No to the contamination, corruption, and illegal exploitation in our country, which in your cases the peoples and the government prohibit. We demand that you respect:

14.5.3.1 The national and international laws, regulations and conventions.

14.5.3.2 The organization and the will of the people.

14.5.3.3. The obligatory consultations with the communities, with a binding character.

14.5.3.4. The corrective measures which have risen from the Environmental Impact Evaluation (EAI).

15. LINES OF ACTION OF THE BISHOP, THE PRIESTS, AND THE PARISHES

15.1. Study and deepening of the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* [of Pope Francis] at every level of the church.

15.2. Campaigns for Protection of the Environment through the MCS, Social Ministry, Caritas, etc.

15.3. Organization of Committees for the Defense of the Environment (Land, Water, Forests, etc.)

15.4. Support of Civil Society Organizations which protect the environment and human life (ASONOG, MADJ, CIPRODEH, etc.)

16. With hope based in the fulfillment of the Messianic promise of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1), TODAY WE BUILD a “NEW DIOCESAN SOLIDARITY.” With optimism and joy we sing the “Canticle of Daniel 3,” joined with Holy Mary, Queen of all that is created, with Saint Joseph, Protector of the Universal Church, and with Saint Francis of Assisi, “most excellent example of care for what is weak and of integral ecology, lived joyfully and authentically” (LS 10).

Let the earth bless the Lord, sing eternally in his honor;
mountains and hills, bless the Lord, sing eternally in his honor;
everything that grow in the earth, bless the Lord, sing eternally in his honor;
springs of water, bless the Lord, sing eternally in his honor;
seas and rivers, bless the Lord, sing eternally in his honor;
whales and all that swim in the sea, bless the Lord, sing eternally in his honor;
birds of the air, bless the Lord, sing eternally in his honor;
wild beasts and cows, bless the Lord, sing eternally in his honor.

Monseñor Darwin Rudy Andino Ramirez. C.R.S.

Bishop of the Diocese of Santa Rosa de Copán

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES:

For translating texts of church documents, the translator consulted the English translations of *Laudato Si'* and the *Aparecida Document* but changed them, at times, significantly, when he felt they did not reflect the Spanish translation used in this pronouncement.

He also sometimes included the Spanish words in square parentheses [] when he felt that the English translation he made may not reflect the full significance and nuances of the Spanish.

Words or phrases included within square parentheses [] were added by the translator.

I have translated the word “presbiterio” in two different ways. “El presbiterio” is used to indicate the body of priests in an area. I have translated it as “presbytery” or as “priests” in the plural.

If there are any errors, please feel free to contact the translator.

Please share with Catholic and other Christian churches

Please share this statement widely, particularly with Catholic and other Christian churches you know of, are involved with. Would your Catholic church (or any denomination) like to get more involved in supporting the Azacualpa community members resisting the desecration of their cemetery, defending the environment and human rights? (contact: info@rightsaction.org)

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.

Write/Contact

Write the company directly, with copies to your media and elected politicians in Canada and the U.S., calling of them to suspend all aspects of the Aura/MINOSA mining operation in Honduras, including the digging up of bodies.

Aura Minerals

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Mas informacion

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Tax-Deductible Donations (Canada & U.S.)

Since 2014, Rights Action has supported the Azacualpa Environmental Committee and their environmental, community, human rights and cemetery defense work. To support their cemetery and community, human rights and environmental defense struggle, 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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(Contributions can be made anonymously)

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