

## Documents confirm corruption of Guatemalan State by Solway Investment Group mining company

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/corruption-of-guatemalan-state-by-solway-investment-group>

- Below: An article about a new series of reports from 20 international media outlets about mining linked corruption infiltrating the highest levels of the Guatemalan state and government

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://forbiddenstories.org/in-guatemala-the-devils-metal-is-ravaging-local-environme...>. The page features the Forbidden Stories logo and a navigation menu. A prominent headline reads "IN GUATEMALA, THE “DEVIL’S METAL” IS RAVAGING LOCAL ENVIRONMENTS". Below the headline, the article text begins: "In Guatemala, those who dare to criticize the devastating environmental impacts of a nickel mine built on ancestral lands, like journalist Carlos Choc, have been reduced to silence. For years, the mine’s owners have managed to hide the proof of damage caused to the neighboring environment, but today Forbidden Stories and its partners are lifting the veil of Solway Group, which owns the mine, and revealing its best-hidden secrets." The page also includes a newsletter sign-up form with fields for "First Name", "Last Name", and "Your email", and a "DONATE" button.

These reports re-confirm and add to much of what is published in “**TESTIMONIO: Canadian Mining in the Aftermath of Genocides in Guatemala**”, edited by Catherine Nolin and Grahame Russell. (<https://btlbooks.com/book/testimonio>, [www.testimoniothebook.org](http://www.testimoniothebook.org))

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## Leaked Documents Confirm Cooptation of Guatemalan State by Mining Company

by Julie López, March 9, 2022, El Faro news

<https://mailchi.mp/elfaro.net/el-estor-6214192>

A mass document leak published by 20 international news outlets including El Faro uncovered how the international owners of an open-pit nickel mine paid off Guatemalan security forces, ignored court orders, and consorted with the highest echelons of Guatemalan government to obscure pollution, crush local dissent, and continue operating with the tolerance of three administrations.

### **The Power of Mining**

A leak of more than eight million company documents revealed how the mining company Solway, operating illegally in El Estor, a Maya Q'eqchi' town near the Caribbean coastline, bought local police and Indigenous leaders, spied on journalists, classified residents as allies or enemies, and sought to expel communities from ancestral land.

They even planned to disseminate false rumors of an HIV/AIDS breakout, in a yearslong scheme of propaganda and repression to thwart local resistance to the extraction and processing of nickel for exportation, reports El Faro's Julie López, part of the consortium of international journalists that published the leaks, led by Forbidden Stories (<https://forbiddenstories.org/in-guatemala-the-devils-metal-is-ravaging-local-environments>), and including:

- LeMonde ([https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2022/03/06/mining-secrets-nouvelles-revelations-sur-les-pratiques-controversees-d-un-geant-de-l-industrie-miniére-au-guatemala\\_6116375\\_3210.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2022/03/06/mining-secrets-nouvelles-revelations-sur-les-pratiques-controversees-d-un-geant-de-l-industrie-miniére-au-guatemala_6116375_3210.html)),
- The Guardian (<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/mar/06/indigenous-groups-oppose-restarting-guatemala-nickel-mine>),
- El Pais (<https://elpais.com/internacional/2022-03-06/asi-se-compra-un-estado-como-una-minera-rusa-corrumpio-a-todos-los-poderes-en-guatemala.html>)
- and Guatemala's Prensa Comunitaria (<https://www.prensacomunitaria.org/2022/03/diez-claves-para-leer-la-investigacion-miningsecrets/>).

Leaked company documents also revealed that, in 2017, company executives received an internal report (<https://forbiddenstories.org/in-guatemala-the-devils-metal-is-ravaging-local-environments/>) concluding that sediment from the mine's exploitation zones was seeping into Lake Izabal. In public the company said discoloration in the lake was merely algae.

Documents also prove that Solway kept digging despite a 2019 Constitutional Court order to cease operations until carrying out a consultation with local communities. Guatemalan authorities never enforced the injunction. The mine has operated with the unabated backing of the last three Guatemalan presidents.

### **Corruption at highest levels of State**

The enormous influence over the Guatemalan state wielded by the Swiss-Russian mining company fuels broad suspicions of a corrupt pact for financial gain and impunity reaching the highest levels of the Guatemalan government.

When the Q'eqchi' Ancestral Councils shut down the road to the dig site last October in protest of the lack of consultation, Solway asked the Guatemalan government for help, documents reveal. President Alejandro Giammattei responded just days later by declaring martial law and security forces went as far as to escort the trucks to the dig site and raid the homes of those opposing the mine. Seventeen community leaders were arrested.

### **“A rolled carpet stuffed with cash”**

Serious questions about President Alejandro Giammattei's ties to mining interests surfaced last July when The New York Times revealed that a witness testified that he had gone to Giammattei's house to drop off a rolled carpet stuffed with cash (<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/24/world/americas/guatemala-corruption-migrants.html>). The carpet, said the witness, was a bribe from a Russian mining company in exchange for port access.

### **\$2.6 million in bribes for President Giammattei**

In February, El Faro and CNN published evidence that Giammattei had negotiated \$2.6 million in bribes

(<https://elfaro.net/en/202202/centroamerica/26008/Witness-Accuses-Guatemalan-President-of-Funding-Campaign-with-Construction-Bribes.htm>)

during his 2019 campaign from a network of construction firms looking for major state concessions after he took office.

### **Persecution against anti-corruption prosecutors and judges**

While evidence of corruption at the highest levels of the state is accumulating, there is little possibility that Guatemalan authorities will open an investigation. At

least 12 anti-corruption prosecutors have been forced into exile in the last eight months, persecuted by Attorney General Consuelo Porras, who is sanctioned by the U.S. for obstructing justice.

Just this week, anti-mafia judge Erika Aifán, who received testimony about the campaign bribes, may soon face arrest despite broad international indignation.

The Guatemalan state cracked down on local reporting on El Estor. In 2017 a Maya Q'eqchi' reporter from outlet Prensa Comunitaria, Carlos Choc, captured the only known photograph of a protester murdered by security forces. He was charged (<https://elpais.com/internacional/2022-03-06/asi-se-compra-un-estado-como-una-minera-rusa-corrompio-a-todos-los-poderes-en-guatemala.html>) with "instigating delinquency" and is still awaiting trial. Other reporters from the outlet have received threats for their work relating to the mine.

Forbidden Stories (<https://forbiddenstories.org/in-guatemala-the-devils-metal-is-ravaging-local-environments/>) picked up where the local press was forced to leave off. "The resistance strategies of those of us who suffer oppression must take place globally, on a systemic level," said the hacking collective Guacamaya, which handed the documents (<https://forbiddenstories.org/the-struggle-of-one-territory-must-be-the-struggle-of-all/>) to the consortium. "The struggle of one territory must be the struggle of all, because ultimately this is about the defense of life, the human species and other living beings."

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#### **TESTIMONIO: Canadian Mining In The Aftermath Of Genocides In Guatemala**

- Order books: <https://btlbooks.com/book/testimonio>
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Organize public presentations: Grahame Russell ([info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org)) / Catherine Nolin ([Catherine.Nolin@unbc.ca](mailto:Catherine.Nolin@unbc.ca))

More information: [www.testimoniothebook.org](http://www.testimoniothebook.org)

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