

Rights Action

www.rightsaction.org • March 2007

WHO IS THE REAL PAID ACTOR?

We reproduce here an edited version of a public letter explaining how the Canadian ambassador to Guatemala said that an impoverished Mayan Q'eqchi' woman, interviewed in a documentary about forced evictions in favour of Canadian Skye Resources nickel mining company, was a "paid actress".

While we are obviously upset with the mis-information spread by the Canadian Ambassador, the larger issue is the

unjust global development order. To continue to support good, locally controlled development, environment and human rights projects, we must criticize the unjust global development order and we must expose the role played by northern governments in promoting and defending this order.

Thank-you for your on-going support and trust in our work. Questions, comments, suggestions: info@rightsaction.org

February 28, 2007

Peter MacKay, Minister of Foreign Affairs, MacKay.P@parl.gc.ca; James Lambert, Director General, Latin America and Caribbean Bureau, DFAIT, james.lambert@international.gc.ca; Kenneth Cook, Canadian Ambassador to Guatemala, kenneth.cook@international.gc.ca

Dear Sirs,

We, the undersigned, write with concern over the conduct of Canadian ambassador to Guatemala, Kenneth Cook. Ambassador Cook has been misinforming people about a documentary film produced by Steven Schnoor who was in Central America working in collaboration with Rights Action and various Guatemalan and Honduran development, environment and human rights organizations.

Illegal evictions of Mayan Q'eqchii people

On January 8th and 9th of this year, Schnoor, Canadian journalist Dawn Paley and photographer James Rodriguez were present near the town of El Estor in eastern Guatemala during the forced evictions of several Mayan Q'eqchi' communities residing on lands claimed to be owned by the Guatemalan Nickel Company—a subsidiary of Canada's Skye Resources.

[Watch the 9-minute video: <http://www.rightsaction.org/video/elestor>. Read Paley's article, "This is What Development Looks Like," at <http://www.dominionpaper.ca/articles/899>. See Rodriguez's photographs at: http://mimundo-jamesrodriguez.blogspot.com/2007_01_01_archive.html]

The evictions were illegal and destructive. Close to 700 armed police and soldiers encircled the communities as workers paid by the mining company destroyed

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WHO IS THE REAL PAID ACTOR?

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people's homes. Skye Resources claims that the evictions were peaceful and that the forces that carried them out were unarmed.

Schnoor produced a 9-minute documentary about the evictions. The film shows some of Rodriguez's photos of armed soldiers running through the woods, as families watch their homes being burned to the ground; in the film, a poor Mayan Q'eqchi' woman furiously rails against the injustice of the situation as she and her family watch their home being dismantled by company employees, while surrounded by hundreds of police.

Mis-information

Multiple sources say Ambassador Cook told them the film lacks credibility because:

- 1 The photographs shown in the video were not taken at the evictions; rather, they are photographs from as far back as the Guatemalan civil war that have been used many times in different places.
- 2 The impoverished Mayan Q'eqchi' woman seen railing against the injustice of the evictions was actually a paid actress from the town of El Estor, paid by Schnoor to "perform" in this manner.

These claims are unequivocally false. The photographs used in Schnoor's film were shot by photographer James Rodriguez at the evictions near El Estor on January 8th and 9th, 2007. One particular photograph which Cook claims to have seen many times before—of an indigenous man burying his head in his hand in a gesture of despair—is on the cover of Guatemalan magazine *Este País* (February 2007, Vol. 2, No. 8) for a feature story on the recent evictions. Several more of Rodriguez's photos from the evictions can be found inside the magazine. Dawn Paley, the Canadian journalist also present at the evictions, has photographs of the same individual.

Cook's allegation that the Mayan Q'eqchi' woman in the video was actually a paid actress is so absurd that it almost might not merit response, were it not for the damage such a claim can do to Schnoor's reputation, to say little of how insulting such a claim is to the woman and underlying issues in question.

A response needed

We call on the government of Canada for an explanation, apology and inquiry into this matter. We believe this behaviour is symptomatic of a larger policy position which privileges Canadian extractive industries operating abroad over concerns for the rights and well-being of local communities.

Those familiar with Guatemalan history know that the country is infamous for its record of repression, corruption and flagrant violations of human rights. During the 36-year armed conflict, which officially ended 10 years ago, it is estimated that over 250,000 people were killed or disappeared—80% of whom were indigenous people.

Canadian mining investment is implicated in this history. Rights to the lands where the recent evictions took place were granted to INCO (a Canadian nickel mining company) by a Guatemalan military government in 1965. INCO's activities were facilitated by successive military regimes that massacred and repressed their own people. Both the United Nations Truth Commission (Commission





© Flaviano Bianchini. Aerial photos of the open-pit, cyanide leaching gold mine, owned by Goldcorp [formerly Glamis Gold Inc.] and operated in Mayan territories of the department of San Marcos, Guatemala.

for Historical Clarification—CEH) and the *Nunca Mas* (Never Again) report by the Human Rights Office of the Archbishop of Guatemala, found INCO (through its subsidiary EXMIBAL) complicit in human rights violations against opponents of the mining project, including threats and assassinations.

It is in this historical context and through the recent forced evictions that Skye Resources is trying to continue with nickel mining in the region. It does so despite indigenous peoples' claims they were never previously and freely consulted, as required by the International Labor Organization's Convention 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, ratified by Guatemala in 1996. Furthermore, Skye has never produced property titles to many of the lands it claims to own—casting doubt upon the legality of the recent evictions.

We call on Ambassador Cook to explain why he made his statements and to retract them. We call upon the government of Canada to investigate the broader implications of the ambassador's actions—actions that are symptomatic of Canadian government policy that privileges Canadian extractive industries operating abroad over the human rights and development needs of local communities. Cook's predecessor, James Lambert, also made public statements defending Canadian mining investments while dismissing concerns over human rights violations in the process.

We look forward to hearing from you and will respond to any questions you might have, provide further information about these issues and participate in any hearings your offices and parties might organize.

Steven Schnoor, Dawn Paley, James Rodriguez, Grahame Russell & Sandra Cuffe (Rights Action)

DELEGATION TO GUATEMALA

JULY 22-28, 2007

FOR WHOM: Citizens, activists, donors, educators, journalists, legal activists, students, Moms and Dads, concerned about poverty, repression and foreign interventions, enviro-destruction in countries of the 'global south', and about community-based resistance and work for equality, justice and enviro-well being.

STUDY PLAN: Through city-based meetings with development, enviro- and HR activists, and over-night visits to rural areas (including communities negatively affected by mining and other "development" projects), group members will learn directly from people where the negative impacts of the exploitation, racism and repression have been most felt. The trip will focus on:

- ▶ **HISTORY:** In readings sent out before the trip, and discussions in country, this trip will provide a summary understanding of 500 years of Guatemalan (& Honduran ?) history ñ including the role played by the powerful, wealthy countries of the global north. This historical perspective is necessary to understanding Guatemala's (and Honduras' ?) endemic poverty, racism, repression, impunity and lack of democracy;
- ▶ **PARTICULAR ISSUES:** Indigenous and popular resistance to the harms and violations caused by the global mining industry (including the Skye Resources/INCO nickel and/or Goldcorp/Glamis gold mining operations); efforts to seek justice and reparations for the U.S.- and western-backed repression of the 1980s; efforts to seek justice and reparations for forced evictions and massacres related to mega-development projects, like the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank funded "Chixoy Hydro-electric Dam project"; etc;
- ▶ **RESISTANCE & GRASSROOTS MOVEMENTS:** Despite the repression, exploitation and enviro-destruction, there are courageous and vibrant grassroots people organizing and fighting for a just development model, for democracy and the rule of law, for the environment and women's rights.

This trip, led by Grahame Russell of Rights Action in conjunction with key partner groups in the region, will enable participants to learn first-hand about community development, enviro- and HR struggles and organizing, and about how to be involved, in North America, with education work and political and legal activism in support of community-controlled development, enviro- and HR work.

RISKS: Rights Action will have an open discussion with participants about potential risks: on-going political issues; crime; health; etc. Participants will sign a waiver, accepting responsibility for what might happen during the trip.

COSTS: US\$625. This includes 3 meals a day for 6 days; board for 7 nights/ in-country transportation / translation / guiding / honorariums for local community-based groups that participants visit with. Participants are responsible for arranging and paying for their travel to and from Guatemala.

INTERESTED: info@rightsaction.org, 860-352-2152,

RIGHTS ACTION SPEAKING TOURS, SPRING 2007

NORTH AMERICAN MINING COMPANY GREED VS. NEEDS AND RIGHTS OF CENTRAL AMERICANS

Are you interested in hosting education events in your community?

WHEN: mid-April to mid-May 2007 **WHERE:** Western Canada and Western USA

① WESTERN CANADA: Vinicio López Maldonado and Dawn Paley

Vinicio is an organizer and educator with the MTC (Campesino Worker's Movement) and COPAE (Pastoral Commission for Peace and Ecology) in San Marcos, Guatemala. His work includes supporting opposition to a cyanide-leaching, open pit gold mining operation of the Vancouver-based Goldcorp (formerly Glamis Gold) mining company, through widespread education and the organization of community-based consultations and development projects.

Dawn, an independent journalist and organizer based in Vancouver, recently traveled to Guatemala and Honduras to report on the effects of Canadian mining projects on the development, enviro- and human rights of local populations. (Articles available on request)

Interested in hosting an event in Western Canada? Contact Dawn at 604-715-4180 or dawnpaley@gmail.com.

General info: info@rightsaction.org, www.rightsaction.org, 1-860-352-2152. Rights Action will ask interested organizations to contribute towards the over-all costs of the tour.

② WESTERN USA: Carlos Amador Aleman and Sandra Cuffe

Carlos is an organizer, educator and leader of the Siria Valley Environmental Committee in Francisco Morazón, Honduras. His work includes exposing the multiple violations and harms being caused a cyanide-leaching, open pit gold mining operation of the Vancouver-based Goldcorp (formerly Glamis Gold) mining company, and to promote and work for community controlled alternative development projects.

Sandra works with Rights Action and has lived and worked in Honduras for over three years, working on and writing about development, environment and human rights issues with community organizations in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador; Sandra has investigated and written extensively about the violations and harms caused by North American mining companies including Goldcorp (formerly Glamis Gold) articles available on request.

Interested in hosting an event in Western USA? Contact Sandra atcaminando27@yahoo.es.

General info: info@rightsaction.org, www.rightsaction.org, 1-860-352-2152. Rights Action will ask interested organizations to contribute towards the over-all costs of the tour.



HONDURAS: A mother lifts her daughter's shirt, exposing the young girl's chest. Her skin has a strange pigmentation, which set in after a period of dryness and rashes that began close to a year earlier. The family lives in El Pedernal, in the Siria Valley of Honduras, where Goldcorp/Glamis Gold has been operating an open pit goldmine since 2000. Independent studies have shown high levels of lead and arsenic in the blood of local residents, as well as heavy metals in domestic water sources. Unexplained skin diseases are common in the area. Photo by Dawn Paley, 2007.

OAXACA

HUMAN RIGHTS AND EMERGENCY RELIEF FUND

Building on work that RA has long supported in Chiapas, Mexico, (and Guatemala, Honduras and Haiti), RA was approached by the Oaxaca Solidarity Network (OSN) to help respond to the situation of extreme repression in Oaxaca since mid-2006. In conjunction with the OSN, RA has co-sponsored two emergency delegations to Oaxaca, December 16-22 and February 10-16.

Filmed testimony of victim of torture

At www.rightsaction.org you will find articles, testimonies and reports. You can download and watch a 25-minute interview (Spanish, with English sub-titles) with Porfirio Domínguez Muñozcano, an architect almost beaten to death by Oaxacan security forces. A courageous man, Porfirio is now publicly denouncing what happened to him, demanding justice for all victims of repression.

THE TRIPS: In Oaxaca, our delegations (North Americans from many walks of life) met with: victims of illegal detentions that mostly included physical and psychological torture; family members of persons assassinated; government officials; human rights and community development organizations; religious leaders; journalists; union members.

GENERAL SITUATION: Since May 2006, Oaxaca has been experiencing a broad-based political and social uprising. The underlying causes of the uprising—poverty and the unjust economic-development model, racism, repression by government and economic elites, impunity and absence of justice, lack of real democracy—go back generations.

In response to the uprising, the Oaxacan government of Ulises Ruiz, backed by the federal government of President Felipe Calderon, cracked down with a brutality and arbitrariness that stunned even hardened human rights activists in Oaxaca, Mexico and beyond. The National Human Rights Commission reported that a minimum of 20 people have been killed, 350 (illegally) detained, and 370 wounded. Beyond these figures, considered conservative by everyone our delegations met with, there are 100s of documented cases of psychological and physical torture. Many are still being held in abusive conditions of arbitrary detention.

APPEAL FOR FUNDS: Rights Action has been providing funds to victim-support organizations and individual victims, for:

- ▶ needs of families whose money-earners have been killed, illegally jailed and/or harmed by torture;
- ▶ travel, communication and food costs of family members and friends of the disappeared and illegally detained who are working so that their loved ones in jails are released from their arbitrary detentions;
- ▶ investigation and reporting, and transportation and communication costs of family-support, religious and human rights organizations that are at the forefront of denouncing and trying to put a stop to the State repression.

HURRICANE STAN RELIEF AND REBUILDING WORK

Many thanks to all donors—individual and institutional—for your support dating back to October 2005, for our emergency and community rebuilding work in Guatemala in response to the death and destruction caused by Hurricane Stan. Stan devastated the western highlands and boca costa mountainsides leading down to the pacific coast. The number of persons killed or disappeared is over 2000; 600 villages were negatively affected; thousands of homes (mainly small huts) were destroyed.

After Stan hit, Rights Action began funding deliveries of food, water, bedding, clothing and medical supplies. Coordinated from our Guatemala City office, this work was done with community-based groups we have long supported and worked with. The short-term emergency relief phase lasted into early January!

VISION OF WORK

While Stan was a devastating storm resulting in floods, mud-slides, etc, the underlying issue to be addressed is the endemic poverty caused by an unjust development-economic model that leaves a majority of Central Americans subsisting in conditions of great vulnerability.

In early 2006, Rights Action began funding medium-term relief and community reconstruction projects, based on an integral community development vision including:

- ▶ Community design of, control over and participation in the reconstruction and rebuilding project;
- ▶ Integral vision of development, including protection of local environment and water sources, and reforesting mountains sides;
- ▶ Prioritizing title to and community and family ownership of lands;
- ▶ Implementing productive projects that prioritize local food security and markets;

PROJECTS FUNDED

- ▶ short-term emergency relief phase: \$110,000;
- ▶ medium- and long-term rebuilding phase: \$500,000;

CCDA – Campesino Committee For Development In The Highlands

For years, RA has supported and worked with CCDA on community development projects. In response to Stan, CCDA is working in Mayan-Tzutujil communities of the department of Solola, and Mayan-Mam communities in the department of San Marcos: planting organic coffee that they sell to international fair trade partners; planting subsistence crops of corn and beans.

ASECSA – Association of Community Health Services

RA has long supported and worked with ASECSA ñ a leading community health/ dental/ midwifery organization—on community health projects. In response to Stan, ASECSA is supporting the building of *granjas integrales* (integral farms) in Mayan-Quiche communities of Tziamjuyub, Pakoval II and Xeabaj II, in the municipality of Santa Catarina Ixtahuacan, department of Solola.

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HURRICANE STAN

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CODECA – Campesino Development Committee

RA has long supported and worked with CODECA on community development and human rights issues on the south-coastal and boca costa regions. In response to Stan, CODECA is supporting projects: in the Mayan community (a mixture of Quiche, Mam, Kakchikel, Tzutujil, ladino) of Monsenor Romero (105 families; department of Suchitepequez), CODECA is developing a 5-tank Tilapia fish farm and cultivating staple crops ñ corn and ajonjoli; in the campesino community of Rancho Alegre (280 families; municipality of Mazatenango, department of Retalhuleu), CODECA is developing a milk cow and a watermelon and bamboo production project, as well as the cultivating of corn and ajonjoli crops; in the campesino community of Nueva Linda (department of Retalhuleu), CODECA is developing a artesanía and agricultural production project.

AGEMA – Association of Integral Development and Community Health Generation of Corn

RA began working with and supporting AGEMA, in response to Stan. In the municipality of Santa Catarina Ixtahuacan (department of Solola), AGEMA is working with a new

community of 100 families of a total of 405 families from 8 different communities that lost homes, land and crops (corn, beans, coffee) to Stan. The communities were: Xoljá, Pacutamá sector I, Pacutamá sector II, Chajuab, Chiucutamá, Pacorral I, Pacorral II, Tzamjuyup and Xeabaj II. For months, these families were in temporary shelters supported by government and non-government (including Rights Action) funding sources.

A new community is being built called “Nuevo Asentamiento Chiquizis.” There are three components to this work: providing *techo minimo* ñ supplies to build minimal housing structures with simple but sturdy walls and roof; planting a variety of fruit trees (Manzanas, Ciruelas, Melocotones, y Aguacates); building and planting 3 community gardens.

CLINICA MAXENA

RA began working with the Clinica Maxena (that has a long term relation with ASECSA) in response to Stan. In the municipality of Santo Tomas la Union, department of Suchitepequez, the integral health Clinica Maxena is working in the Mayan-Quiche communities of Pala and Patzaj to build community and family gardens.

Further funding is needed — RA has a long-term rebuilding proposal available on request.

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