

Rights Action

www.rightsaction.org • April 2009

When Is Enough Documented Harm and Destruction Enough?

Dear friends,

Please consider making a donation — large or small — to Rights Action for our on-going work.

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Under-Mining Development Model

Recently, we have concentrated much time and resources in support of campesino and indigenous communities resisting and trying to remedy the environmental destruction, health harms and human rights violations caused by North American mining companies.

Education, organization-building and activism related to large-scale “development” enterprises (mining, hydro-electric dams, 5-star enclave tourism projects) go to the heart and center of the debate and work in Guatemala, Honduras and beyond, about what kind of “development” model the majority poor people need and want.

A “GLOBAL” ISSUE

This work is not only in Guatemala and Honduras. Rights Action is committing time and resources to debate and activism in Canada and the United States about global corporate and investment policies defined by our governments, and institutions like the World Bank,

policies that are beneficial to American and Canadian investors, pension funds and company shareholders, even as the environmental destruction, health harms and human rights violations happen in poor communities in far away countries.

NOT “SENSATIONALISM”

Earlier this year, a critic wrote that Rights Action “resorts to sensationalism” in denouncing harms and violations related to Goldcorp Inc’s mines in Guatemala and Honduras. We disagree. The health harms, environmental destruction and human rights violations being documented near Goldcorp’s open-pit cyanide heap-leach mines in Guatemala and Honduras, speak for themselves.

WWW.RIGHTSACTION.ORG

Available on our website, RA recently published an article by Grahame Russell and a photo essay by RA’s Karen Spring and Francois Guindon, addressing health harms suffered by impoverished Mayan Mam people who live close to Goldcorp’s mine in Guatemala:

- Article: “Who Is Emeterio Perez? And Why Goldcorp Inc. Shareholders & Investors Ought To Know”
- Photo-Essay: “Health Harms In San Miguel Ixtahuacan, Where Goldcorp Inc. Operates An Open-pit, Cyanide Leaching Gold Mine”

TAX DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS:

Make checks payable to “Rights Action” and mail to the appropriate US or Canadian office. **For donations of stock, contact:** Grahame Russell at info@rightsaction.org

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The BBC news service of England followed up with an article about some of these issues: “Canadian Mine Accused Of Causing Skin Infections.”

Our work in Goldcorp mine-affected communities goes back to 2005 in Guatemala and 2003 in Honduras. The health harms, environmental destruction and other human rights violations began years ago and seem to be snow-balling now. Recently, we have circulated more reports and photo-essays about harms and destruction probably caused, directly or indirectly, by Goldcorp’s mines:

- Photo-Essay: “Gold mining and health harms in Honduras”
- News article: “How cattle and even vultures are dying due to pollution probably coming from Goldcorp Inc’s “San Martin” mine in Honduras”
- Report: “A Chronology of Indifference”, about the lack of response by the governments of Honduras and Canada and Goldcorp Inc. to health problems suffered by the Siria Valley population in Honduras
- Report: “Church Group Finds More Contaminants (Arsenic) in Rivers Near Goldcorp Inc’s “Marlin Mine” in Guatemala”

The harms and violations documented in these recent reports and publications confirm what has been set out previously:

- Report “Investing in Conflict” by Dawn Paley
- Film: “All That Glitters Is Not Gold” by Steven Schnoor
- News article: “Lead, mercury, arsenic found in Siria Valley population living near mine operated by Goldcorp Inc”

WHEN IS ENOUGH HARM AND DESTRUCTION ENOUGH?

We who work at RA are not doctors or health experts. We base our conclusions firstly on interviews with affected community members, during regular visits to the mine-affected communities, on interviews with doctors and environmental, human rights and development experts who have first-hand knowledge of the problems, and on our own studies of health and enviro-harms and human rights violations that often occur near mines across countries of the global south.

Many national and international human rights defenders, including Rights Action, have expressed concern about these health, environmental and human rights problems that require the urgent attention of neutral experts. The Governments of Guatemala and Honduras (let alone Canada) are unable or uninterested in responding.

We believe the only legal and ethical response, in the face of these legal, ethical, health, and environmental problems, is for the Governments of Guatemala and Honduras to suspend mining operations until comprehensive, neutral and binding investigations have been carried out on the health, human rights and environmental issues, and until such time as free and informed consent can be obtained from those potentially at risk.

“Informed” consent includes the provision of expert opinions about the current problems and future risks. It also includes consideration of social and cultural issues, land rights, and overall development models.

There are many ways that people and groups in North America, particularly in Canada, can and ought to get involved in this work for justice and compensation ... but first we need to ask the Guatemalan, Honduran and Canadian governments, the Goldcorp company and investors, when is enough documented harm and destruction enough?

Thank-you for your trust in and support for our work.



Canadian Mine Accused of Causing Skin Infections

BY BILL LAW, BBC NEWS REPORTER, RADIO 4 CROSSING CONTINENTS

Wednesday, 11 March 2009 • <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7934513.stm>

The photographs are disturbing, Mayans young and old covered in blisters and welts. Anti-mining activists say the rashes result from water polluted by a giant open-pit gold mine located in the Western Highlands of Guatemala.

Marlin Mine is owned and operated by a large Canadian corporation called Goldcorp. The company strongly denies any link between their operation — which in a hot gold market is running 24 hours a day, seven days a week — and the ill health of the Mayans.

Responding to the charge, the company said in a statement: “Comprehensive sampling conducted by the technical staff of the Public Ministry in Guatemala as well as by the Marlin environmental department has confirmed that river water quality is not adversely impacted by mine operations.”

Bill Brassington heads a Canadian union pension fund that invests in Goldcorp and has seen the pictures taken by an American-Canadian non-governmental organisation called Rights Action. He points out that Rights Action has no medical evidence to support its claims. Still, as an ethical investor he is worried.

ASSESSING IMPACT

Besides the rashes, Goldcorp has been accused by some Guatemalan campaign groups and NGOs of unfair land purchase practices, human rights violations and environmental damage to the area surrounding the mine. Critics also say the company is taking huge amounts of profit out of impoverished indigenous communities and putting very little back in.

Goldcorp emphatically rejects all those claims. In a bid to deal with the concerns, Brassington is heading a Human Rights Impact Assessment (HRIA) committee. It was set up last year and is funded by Goldcorp.

Critics say the offer to pay for the HRIA was Goldcorp’s way of heading off a potentially embarrassing motion at last year’s annual general meeting in Vancouver.



Mr Brassington says: "My personal opinion is they have a way to go when it comes to community relations." But he remains optimistic, adding that the process is building trust and that community groups "seem positive".

However, Professor Douglas Cassel of the University of Notre Dame's Centre for Civil and Human Rights declined Goldcorp's offer to tender a bid for the HRIA. "We were not confident that the terms set down by Goldcorp would result in a full and independent picture emerging," says Professor Cassel. It was awarded instead to a Canadian consulting company called On Common Ground. Now Professor Cassel's group is working with the Catholic church in Guatemala on a separate HRIA that he hopes will be released at the same time as Brassington's.

Grahame Russell of Rights Action, the organisation behind the photographs, is dismissive of the Brassington initiative, arguing that no-one from the Mayan communities was consulted at any stage and that they have no representation on the committee. "The terms, the rules, the set-up — that was done without any involvement of the Mayans.

"Goldcorp and their investors are laughing all the way to the bank. The price of gold is the bottom line."

GOLDCORP PROFITS

While other markets continue to collapse, gold is hovering at \$900-\$1,000 an ounce. When the Marlin mine was first costed, the project's viability was based on gold selling at \$350 an ounce. Not surprising then that Goldcorp's fourth-quarter profits in 2008 more than tripled to \$958m.

Goldcorp insists it is a socially responsible company. It points to health clinics open to everyone in the community, micro-finance projects and support for local schools as proof of its commitment to the Mayans.

In its statement the corporation said: "Our commitment to operating in a socially responsible manner informs everything we do as a company, and our record for socially and environmentally responsible operations is outstanding."

Not so, says Canada's respected Jantzi Social Index which rates companies for investors on how socially responsible they are. Last year Jantzi kicked Goldcorp off the index citing, among other issues, opposition to the mine from local indigenous communities.

Jantzi's Irene Sosa says: "We want to see them being more pro-active. Goldcorp needs better consultation with the community. The company needs to look at addressing grievances, not dismissing them."

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