

Canadian Mining in Latin America

Corporate Social Responsibility and Women's Testimonies

GLEVYS RONDON

Les corporations minières canadiennes ont dominé le marché des investissements en Amérique latine dans la dernière décennie. Quand on sait que l'industrie a fait peu de cas de l'impact de ses activités sur les femmes, l'intérêt sans précédent des femmes rurales et indigènes face à l'industrie et leur activisme qui dénonce l'impact sur l'homme et l'environnemental sont des réactions positives qui émergent de l'expansion de l'industrie en Amérique latine. Cet article explore la façon dont l'activisme des femmes face aux problèmes issus de l'industrie minière et du développement peut jouer un rôle qui anéantira des siècles de marginalisation socio-économique et peut aider à sensibiliser les communautés à des problèmes qui sont importants pour les femmes.

Desde la década pasada, las corporaciones mineras canadienses han dominado el mercado de las inversiones de la minería en la América latina. Dado que la industria ha puesto muy poca atención al impacto de sus actividades en las mujeres, entre las mujeres rurales e indígenas ha surgido un interés en la minería sin precedentes, y su activismo, que denuncian el impacto en la vida humana y el medio ambiente, es un desarrollo positivo que emerge de la expansión de la minería. Este artículo explora el concepto de Responsabilidad Social de las empresas mineras y el activismo de las mujeres.



Demonstration against ECSA Corriente Resources in San Bosco, a Canadian mining company with projects in Pananza and San Carlos.

Photo: Coordinadora Nacional en Defensa de la Vida y la Soberanía

In the past decade Canadian mining corporations have come to dominate the Latin American mining investment market, an achievement well-documented in the business literature (Mining Association of Canada). However, at the community level, many of these mining corporations have met nothing but fierce opposition. In response to grassroots conflict, mining corporations across the world have coined the concept of “corporate social responsibility” (CSR). The idea that business enterprises should integrate environmental concerns into their operations is not new; what is unique to CSR in the mining context is how major mining corporations have used the concept to discuss is-

ues of social inequality; the rights of groups traditionally excluded such as Indigenous peoples; and to produce complex codes of how they will work with governments and communities. Without doubt, one of the most important changes within the mining sector in the last few years has been its unprecedented interest in promoting high standards of corporate behaviour based on ethical values.

Despite its many limitations (Corporate Watch), the concept and principles of corporate social responsibility can be a useful tool for the evaluation of how much attention Canadian mining corporations pay to the social impact arising from their trade relationship with

Latin America. The rejection of the results of community referendums (“Peru mining vote ‘suspicious’”) highlights the fact that in the area of stakeholder engagement, human rights activists have had little success in their efforts to get Canadian mining corporations to uphold a wide range of basic aspirations, ranging from the right to know about the impact of projects to the right to reject them.

Centuries of marginalization mean that when it comes to mining, women’s status as stakeholders is not considered relevant. Despite a strong case against the Canadian mining industry, the struggle of rural and Indigenous women for social and environmental justice remains unnoticed. The testimonies here discussed represent an attempt to bring out of the shadows the voices and concerns of women affected by Canadian mining projects. Their stories provide evidence not only of the impact of mining on women’s livelihoods but also on how mining corporations benefit from social constraints faced by women resisting the industry—one of the most vulnerable groups of activists in Latin America, according to Amnesty International.

The focus of this article is the personal story of a handful of frontline women activists across the region who are battling to persuade Canadian mining companies to uphold basic, modern, social values already incorporated into the CSR codes of major corporations. Using a gender perspective, this article provides evidence of the minimal interest of Canadian mining corporations not only in issues of social responsibility but also in examining the impact of their activities on rural and Indigenous women.

The Canadian Mining Industry in Latin America

A striking characteristic of the Latin American mining sector is that Canadian corporations outnumber all

other foreign investors. Figures show that Latin America is significant to the Canadian sector both in terms of projects on the ground and exploration investment. In 2006, the Mining Association of Canada reported that Canadian exploration in Latin America was 24 percent, the highest in any region. In the same year, out of 8,706 worldwide mineral projects listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange,

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1,516 were located in Latin America, representing 17 percent of all listed Canadian corporations, and making Latin America the most important region for Canadian mining corporations outside Canada.

Figures alone do not illustrate the significance of what the industry has achieved. Canadian investment is present in the most important projects currently being considered in Latin America. Competition among mining corporations is fierce, so this fact suggests a capacity to succeed where others have failed.

But boldness and a drive to succeed do not explain this success by themselves. Canadian corporate success is tarnished first by the complicity of the industry with military and paramilitary forces linked to violation of human rights. In Intag, Ecuador, the Ascendant Copper corporation demonstrated that Canadian investors were willing to

compromise human rights in order to succeed where others had withdrawn (MAC); while in San Marcos the arrival of Glamis Gold Ltd. (later to become Goldcorp Inc.) prompted Indigenous organizations to organize a popular referendum which led to mining being rejected by western Mayan communities of Guatemala. Dominga Vasquez—Indigenous mayor of Sololá—became the target of the corporation and was publicly charged with offences of instigating and participating in mass actions violating public order and the constitution (Peace Brigades International). She reported that shortly after the charges, she received several phone calls with death threats. “My work impacted on my family. My husband was also threatened” (personal interview, April 2007). Secondly, cases such as the meddling of Canadian authorities with Canadian corporations Glencairn Gold and Vanessa Ventures in Costa Rica show that corruption is far from uncommon (APIA).

There is also evidence that without the Canadian government—a key supporter of the industry—the advancement of the industry in Latin America might not have been so swift. A state machinery capable of negotiating sophisticated bilateral trade agreements with countries such as Peru, Mexico, Chile, Brazil, and Argentina (among the ten top investment destinations in Latin America) has been rather slow in its commitment to producing legal safeguards to ensure that the same companies benefiting from a country’s resources become accountable for their lack of compliance with environmental, labour, and human rights.

Given the number of trade initiatives that have been agreed to, and the selfish elite interests of national governments to expand mining frontiers, it is reasonable to expect that mining investments and conflict within communities in Latin America will grow dramatically. Already in Peru the Ombudsman has confirmed that environmental



Calderon Park, Cuenca, January 12, 2009. Members of the Women's Front Defending Mother Earth protesting persecution and demanding freedom for those jailed on January 5, 2009. Photo: Coordinadora Nacional en Defensa de la Vida y la Soberania

issues are the number one cause of conflict, and that mining conflicts come high on the list. This is not surprising, as more than half of some 6,000 peasant communities have seen their lands affected by mining (CooperAccion).

Women and Mining

Given that the mining industry has paid little attention to the impact of its activity on women, the unprecedented interest of rural and Indigenous women in mining and their activism in denouncing its human and environmental impact is a positive development emerging from the expansion of mining in Latin America. Women who become active do so at great personal cost. First, a great deal of the work for the defence of economic and environmental rights takes the form of open conflict between the state and communities

regarding mineral resources, which has been a determining factor in the criminalization of opposition. In this context, it is not surprising that when rural and Indigenous women step out of their traditional roles as housewives in order to articulate their collective voice of resistance this action triggers deeply ingrained machismo and hostility against them, which in turn increases their marginalization. Such is the experience of Lina Solano from Ecuador: despite being just one of many participating in events raising awareness of the impact of Canadian corporations IAMGOLD and Corriente Resources on protected forests in the Amazon, she was singled out and charged with public disorder, and arrested and prevented from participating in public debates with the local authorities. In 2003, Eloyda Mejia an activist from the town of Estor in Guatemala, reported receiving death threats and was charged

with public unrest when her group delivered several workshops that resulted in the communities rejecting the Canadian corporation Skye Resources. In 2006, when community opposition intensified and property belonging to the corporation was burnt, Mejia was charged with being "an instigator, intellectual author of the conflict" (letter to LAMMP, 15 November 2006).

Secondly, within their own communities, women face the invisible barrier that mining has a distinctive male image and is perceived as a technical activity. Maria Gonzalez, president of the Association of Women Defenders of Social and Environmental Rights, based in Arequipa, Peru, reports that women activists who attend public meetings to discuss mining activities are made to feel as though their opinion is not important. Despite an increased domestic burden in cleaning and caring

for the ill as a result of noise and dust produced by local mines, women's lack of a political voice at the community level is used to deny legitimacy to their direct experiences.

In the mining literature, women's participation on issues of mining and development is beginning to be considered a key factor for the evaluation of CSR's models of good practice ("Ethical Performances") and mining sustainability (Empowering Communities Programme). For Latin American women, a more tangible outcome is that women's activism on issues of mining and development can play a role in destroying centuries of social and economic marginalization as well as help to sensitize communities on issues that are important to women. There are already indications that women's contributions are appreciated: for example in Morona Santiago, Ecuador, the organization Campesina Centro held a "women and mining" public meeting in March 2007 to celebrate women's role in the defence of human rights and the struggle for social justice.

Despite these encouraging signs, changes in the practice of Canadian mining corporations as a direct result of women's activism are yet to be seen. Practice shows that CSR is not an effective mechanism to deliver on many of the essential commitments made by the Canadian mining industry regarding women's human rights and gender equality.

Testimonies

***Margarita Perez Anchiraico
President, Committee of People
Affected by Mining in Mayoc,
Peru***

My name is Margarita Perez Anchiraico and I live in Glorieta de Mayoc, San Mateo de Huanchor, Peru, with my 82-year-old mother, my sons, eleven and ten years old, and other members of my family. For many years the people of San Mateo have suffered from environmental

pollution produced by mining. I struggle with all my power to end the contamination, but I am continually intimidated, verbally abused, and receive death threats.

Next to Mayoc is the Tamboraque mine. In 1998, without consulting the community, the mine owner destroyed the beautiful Mayor forest in order to build a tailings dump that would contain more than a

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ton of toxic waste. Since then, the Committee of People Affected has been asking for the dump to be moved, because the toxic waste is damaging the health of the population. This damage was confirmed in 2002 in a report by the Ministry of Health that identified the presence in our communities of high levels of lead in blood, and arsenic and mercury in urine. The levels exceeded the maximum permitted by the World Health Organization. In 2003, together with CODEMADES (Committee for the Defence of the Environment and Sustainable Development), the Committee of Affected People presented a demand to the Interamerican Human Rights Commission of the Organization of American States (ICHR-OAS), denouncing the effects of the environmental pollution produced by the continued presence of the tailings dump of toxic waste.

In May 2004, I formed part of the official group that carried out a visual inspection of the site. In the report of the inspection, I made it clear that I was not seeking the closure of the mine. All that I asked for was the immediate removal of the tailings and the reforestation of the area. I also said that both the company and the contractor charged with moving the tailings would be responsible for any damage the operation might cause to the population and the environment. I maintain that my demands were just. Notwithstanding, the tailings are still there to this day and the health of our communities—especially the children—continues to be affected by the damaging effects of these highly toxic tailings.

In March 2006, the Tamboraque mine became the property of Minera San Juan, which operates with investments of the Canadian company Gold Hawk Resources Inc. San Juan Mining publicly promised to employ local labour and contracted 50 workers. On a daily basis these workers were told that the mine could not open because the Mayoc Committee of People Affected was placing obstacles in the way. In June, the company applied for a Mining Operations Certificate (granted on July 28, 2006), stating that there were obstacles that would need to be resolved locally. In other words, our demand to the ICHR-OAS was the obstacle that had to be removed. One month later, faced with a threat to stop work by the mining company, a group of workers asked the council of San Mateo for permission to operate the mine. They also requested authorization from the Ministry of Energy and Mines to restart operations in Tamboraque, stating that the mine remained closed as a result of our demand to the OAS.

On June 19, 2006, the San Mateo council convened a public session where several points relating to San Juan Mining were agreed to, but withdrawal of the international

claim was not discussed. The following day, the mining company's head of Human Resources, Raul Ora, rebuked the district mayor for this omission. During the night of June 20, 2006, black ribbons were tied to the homes of the leaders of CODEMADES. At the same time there were rumours of death threats against its president, Ruperto Caceda Vidal, and against me. Stones were thrown onto the roofs of our houses and we were accused of opposing the re-opening of the Tamboraque mine.

Since then, the following incidents occurred against the President of the association, against me, and against my family. These events have been reported to the San Mateo police:

- On the morning of July 15, 2006, the guard dog of the association's president was found dead. It had been poisoned.

- Around midnight on the July 16, one of San Juan Mining's workers, Juan Teodoro Pilco Segura, came to my door to insult me and threaten to blow me up.

- On the morning of the July 17, 2006, workers of San Juan Minera blocked the main road to demand the re-opening of the mine. Later they set upon the president, Ruperto Cacedo Vidal, and local authorities. The latter were forced to take part in a demonstration in front of the Tamboraque mine. During the meeting they accused CODEMADES, Ruperto Caceda Vidal, me, and the Committee of Affected People of being responsible for the mine not working, shouting at the tops of their voices that they wanted us dead.

- Fearing an attempt on my life after the death threat from the worker Pilco Segura, I went to the San Mateo police station accompanied by my nephew Miguel Gonzales Bonafon. When I made the complaint the Police Major, Gino Svagelj Toledo, told me that I could not make the complaint because it was not covered under civil law and that I should go to the prefecture to request protection. When I informed him that I was the president



*Protest against the mining law the government intended to pass, Dec. 4, 2009.
Photo: Coordinadora Nacional en Defensa de la Vida y la Soberania*



*Women from Victoria del Portete protesting IAMGOLD, a Canadian mining company. On World Environment Day, these women pressured the government for Mining Warrants to eliminate mining concessions, Cuenca, June 5, 2008.
Photo: Coordinadora Nacional en Defensa de la Vida y la Soberania*

of the Committee of People Affected by Mining he made a sardonic gesture, asking what ailments we had and what we were ill from.

- Because our lives were in danger, on July 20, we informed Dr. Marcos Orellana of the Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL) in Washington about the death threats and the assaults that Ruperto Cace-

da Vidal and I had received. We also told him of the police's refusal to accept the allegations in San Mateo.

- On July 24, 2006, I attended a meeting at the Ministry of Energy and Mines, which John D. Bracale, Executive President of the San Juan mining company, also attended. During the meeting I made it clear that the international complaint to

the ICHR at the OAS was not an obstacle to the certification requested by the mining company. I stated that the Committee of People Affected by Mining and CODEMADES would be willing to withdraw the complaint if by this means we could avoid the confrontation and social tension created in the population of San Mateo.

•On September 6, 2006, a worker from San Juan, Ruben Ora, washed his company vehicle in front of my house, splashing the area with toxic waste.

•On September 23, 2006, Captain Dias Quiste and three policemen visited me. The captain stated that the *campesino* communities were an obstacle to the development of the country, because where there were communities there was poverty. He recommended that I should go to the police station to request that the police patrols continue, because he was going away, even though his protection was non-existent. As I have no police protection and the mine started to operate without resolving the problem of the pollution, I am constantly the target of comments and jokes from the workers of San Juan and their families. Some of them spit at me when they meet me in the street. Even the dentist in San Mateo, Angel Alcalde, asked me when I was going to change my dentures: "Why don't you get money from the company to fix your teeth?"

•On the morning of October 7, 2006, workers from the company came to Mayoc to take soil samples. One worker, Rolando Dávila, shouted to me with a sarcastic and provocative gesture that he was coming to invade Mayoc. This person continued watching my house with a threatening attitude for five minutes. Later, together with another worker, he knocked on my door and said it was just a joke. They requested permission to take samples from my plot of land. That same morning my 15-year-old niece, Rosa Gonzales, was walking

alone to a nearby store when she was sexually harassed by a worker from the San Juan company.

•On October 19, 2006, I wrote a letter to John D. Bracale, president of San Juan company, in which I stated: "Your workers deserve respect and we, the inhabitants of this community, also deserve respect for the good of the company ... we are still trying to believe in your word

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of living together in harmony as good neighbours and in harmony with Mother Earth."

•On November 5, 2006, Major Svagelj and Police Captain Victor Dias Quiste came to my house. Major Svagelj stated that they came as a precautionary measure of police protection on my behalf, requested by the ICHR-OAS to the Peruvian government. However, this protection did not extend to Ruperto Caceda Vidal. They both insisted that the international complaint was preventing the re-opening of Tamboraque. The police protection provided to me has been sporadic.

•On January 6, 2007, the driver of a van belonging to San Juan Mining almost ran over my nephew, Miguel Gonzales, member of the Committee of Affected People.

•Throughout 2006 and 2007 I repeatedly suffered from cutting of

the electricity cables and the meter being stolen, leaving my house in darkness despite the fact that there are children and old people living there.

Our struggle is not against the mining, we struggle against the environmental pollution. We just want justice.

Update: In May 2008 the company temporarily shut down its activities. A state of emergency was declared by the government on 18 July 2008. This measure was a response to fears of landslides and the rupture of the tailing dam which threatened the Rimac River (upon which Lima depends on for water). The decree called for the relocation of the processing plant and tailing dams. To date, the mine remains closed.

On March 9, 2009, in a letter to LAMMP, Margarita stated that she had been fired in December 2008 from her job as cleaner with the local council. This happened shortly after she reported to the Ministry of Energy and Mining that the ICHR had asked her to report on her case. As a result of the company appealing the decision that upheld Margarita's claim for compensation, the case was transferred to Lima. This has considerably delayed any resolution. Margarita is trying to get the case transferred back to Matucana, where it was originally heard and where the final sentence will be passed. This would allow her to obtain compensation for health damages from the company.

Lina Solano Ortiz
Board Member of Coordinadora
Campesina Popular, Morona
Santiago, Ecuador.
Co-ordinator of the Women's
Defenders of Mother Earth
Group. Founding Member of the
Union of Latin American Women

My name is Lina Solano Ortiz. I am a member of *Coordinadora Campesina Popular*, and responsible for ed-



*Demonstration against the Canadian mining company, ESCA. This demonstration resulted in the arrest of several people who were accused of attacking the corporation's offices, August 28, 2008.
Photo: Coordinadora Nacional en Defensa de la Vida y la Soberanía*

ucation in the province of Morona-Santiago. I am also a board member of *Coordinadora Nacional por la Defensa de la Vida y la Soberanía*. In writing this testimony, I hope to help you to understand what is happening in Ecuador. In my country, communities are in conflict with transactional mining corporations, most of them Canadian. Our communities resist because we do not want the destruction of our lands. We want corporations to respect our right to live and work in peace. However, despite our hopes, for the past ten years we have been living under intimidation, as our lands have been militarized by the government, and paramilitarized by mining corporations.

During 2006, after ten years of mining exploration, several communities decided to stop the destruction of land and stand up to

Lowell Mineral Exploitation and Corriente Resources Inc., two Canadian companies. On November 12, 2006, after a week-long provincial strike, the community and the government signed an agreement in which mining activities in the area were suspended. The Canadian Corrientes Resources Inc., "owner" of the Mirador Project, challenged our agreement and continued operating the mine. To confront this stance, our community organized a meeting at the town hall. After the meeting, we initiated a peaceful march over to Undayme, where the mining camping is located. When we arrived at El Quimi (a bridge over the Zamora River) our march was stopped by the government. For three days afterwards, we were repressed by military forces assaulting our members. Men were jailed and tortured, while women were physi-

cally and sexually abused. While all this occurred in our community, the media was intimidated.

Repression continued in the court of justice. The army initiated a court case against several people, including me. The army claimed that we wanted to take a military base, which resulted in two army members being injured. In 2007, to confront the army's lies, the *Coordinadora Nacional por la Defensa de la Vida y la Soberanía* called for a national demonstration. On that day, I was one of the demonstrators. At 4:00 p.m., five policemen threw themselves against me; the police chief grabbed my breasts while four others took my arms and legs and pushed me inside a police car. While this was happening, Nadia Solis, another member of the group, tried to stop my abduction, but she was also forcibly apprehended. On that

day, around 40 people were arrested. Nidia and I were taken from one police centre to another to prevent our families and friends from finding us. After several hours we were taken to one police station where we were detained until the next day.

On November 16, 2007, several communities from Victoria del Portete, Tarqui and others arrived at Azuay government offices to hear information from the Mining Secretary on the Quimsacocha Project (the Canadian IAMGOLD). The governor, Oswaldo Larriva, blocked my entrance to the building. This act of intimidation was reported to the office of *Defensoria del Pueblo de Azuay*. As communities have been rising every day against mining, the pressure against mining corporations is strong. On March 14, 2008, the *Asamblea Constituyente* amnestied 357 social leaders who had been criminalized and taken to the courts because they were resisting the operation of mining and oil projects and defending communal lands and rights to water. The Resolution recognized that we had been defending our communities and nature. The amnesty benefited those who struggled against the following Canadian mining corporations: Intag / Ascendant Copper Corporation; Yantzaza / Aurelian Resources; El Pangui / Corriente Resources (Ecuadorientes S. A.); Poblador / Minero Industrial; Victoria del Portete / IAMGOLD; Molleturo 7 Ecuadororgold y Ecuadorian Minerals Corporation (EMC); Echandía y Las Naves / Curiminingo Salazar S.A. (uprisings occurred during 2007-2008); the Limón Indanza / Sipetrol (Chilean).

This amnesty shows that our struggle for a country free of mining is coming to be understood by Ecuadorean politicians, however I hope that you, Canadians, can put pressure on your governments to stop subsidies and the issuing licences to the destroyers.

Update: On November 14, 2008, the human rights organization Fron-

tLine sent a letter to the President of Ecuador raising concerns that Lina Solano Ortiz was receiving threatening e-mails from individuals who monitored her work. Also, on two occasions, President Correa publicly criticized Lina's work. She is currently defending herself against a lawsuit brought by the Office of the Public Prosecutor that accuses her of "organised terrorism."

Glevis Rondon is project director of the Latin American Mining Monitoring Programme. LAMMP is the only international organization working to empower rural and indigenous women to voice their concerns about irresponsible mining developments and to build their groups' organisational capacity.

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