

## **Controversial Colombian Mine fuels Canada's Atlantic Provinces**

The Cerrejón is the world's largest open-pit coalmine. The 400 km<sup>2</sup> pit is located in Guajira in northeastern Colombia. In the last 20 years, several indigenous and afro-Colombian farming communities, including Manantial, Caracolí, Chancleta, and Patilla have seen the mine destroy their livelihoods through contamination of the air and water, harassment by the army and private security, loss of their own productive land to the mine, and the loss of employment possibilities on local farms. Others have been forcibly evicted from their homes by state and mine security forces in order to clear the way for the mine's expansion. In August 2001, bulldozers demolished the village of Tabaco after many of its 1,100 Afro-Colombian residents refused to accept the meager amount of money offered by the mine prior to the village's destruction.

The Cerrejon Mine is a principal supplier of coal to the Canadian provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. In fact, Nova Scotia Power purchased \$78 million worth of Colombian coal in 2005 to fuel its power plants and NB Power currently imports approximately a million tons of coal a year to supply its power plant in Belldune. The Canada Pension Plan is a major investor in two of the three main companies that own this mine, with Cdn\$5,145,000,000 shares in Anglo-American, and Cdn\$7,722,000,000 shares in BHP Billiton. NB Power, however, recently sent a letter of concern to the mining company.

In Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, the Atlantic Regional Solidarity Network (ARSN) has worked to create awareness among Canadians of the connections between the electricity in their homes and human rights abuses in Colombia. Displaced Colombian farmers and their supporters argue that Canadian power companies that purchase coal from Cerrejón and refuse to speak out against human rights abuses are fueling a climate of impunity in a land already burning with injustice.

Contact: Ramsey Hart, Atlantic Region Solidarity Network – New Brunswick tel. 506-538-1066, [typha@nb.sympatico.ca](mailto:typha@nb.sympatico.ca) Atlantic Regional Solidarity Network [www.arsn.ca](http://www.arsn.ca)

## **Mining Code Reforms - Direct Support in Colombia**

Through its Energy, Mining and Environmental Project, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) provided technical and financial support to redraft Colombian mining legislation. The revised 2001 Mining Code (Law 685/01), which was adopted without consulting with potentially-affected indigenous communities, created investment conditions that are extremely favourable to foreign companies. The Code weakened a number of existing environmental and social safeguards and created significant financial incentives for companies including dramatically reduced mining royalty and tax rates. This reduces the resources available to the Colombian state for local social and developmental purposes.

Indigenous groups in Colombia argue that the lack of consultation on this new legislation contravened International Labour Organization Convention 169, which was ratified by Colombia and formally adopted into national legislation in 1991. They argue that the new Mining Code places limitations on citizens ability to claim rights to indigenous territory which are accorded

under the Colombian Constitution. Moreover, the legislation eliminates prior requirements that local communities receive economic benefits deriving from mining activity.

From the series [Dirty Business, Dirty Practices](#)

Author [Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability](#)

## **Pascua Lama Gold Mine in Chile –Under Investigation**

Toronto-based Barrick Gold, the world's largest gold mining company, is developing the Pascua Lama mine project high in the Andes, in an area rich with glaciers. The project straddles both Chile and Argentina. In Chile, glacial run-off irrigates the productive Huasco valley, an agricultural centre just south of the Atacama desert.

Barrick's original plan to relocate portions of several glaciers met with public outcry and was rejected by the Chilean government. Barrick now claims that it can extract the gold without damaging the glaciers or significantly impacting water resources in the valley. However, a government report from the General Water Directorate of the Chilean Ministry of Public Works has revealed that between 1981 and 2000, during the prospecting and exploration phase, the size of glaciers Toro 1 & Toro 2 diminished by 56%, and the Esperanza glacier diminished by 70%.

Company executives claim this is the result of climate change. However, the same research showed that the Estrecho and Guanaco glaciers, which were not covered with particulate material released during prospecting activities, maintained their mass during that same period. While global warming has been found to reduce some glaciers in the area by 14%, the unprecedented 70% reduction of the Esperanza glacier is believed to be intimately tied to the mine's activities.

Communities in the area are concerned about future water shortages. In January 2007, the indigenous Diaguita community of Huasco-Altino filed a complaint before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. The Diaguita argue that the government of Chile violated its international legal obligations when it issued the environmental approval for the project, which will be developed on their ancestral territory.

Most recently, members of the Commission on Natural Resources and Environment of the Chilean House of Representatives recognized a series of irregularities that are believed to have been committed in the environmental evaluation for the project. Members of the Commission expressed the need for Congress to form a special Investigative Commission regarding the alleged irregularities, a proposal that is currently being considered by the House of Representatives.

### **For more information contact:**

Karyn Keenan. Halifax Initiative 613-789-4447

Rusa Jeremic, KAIROS, Program Coordinator, Global Economic Justice– cell 416-897-8830

### **LINKS OF INTEREST:**

National Roundtables on Corporate Responsibility

[http://geo.international.gc.ca/cip-pic/current\\_discussions/csr-roundtables-en.asp](http://geo.international.gc.ca/cip-pic/current_discussions/csr-roundtables-en.asp)

Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability media release

[http://www.halifaxinitiative.org/index.php/cnca\\_media/963](http://www.halifaxinitiative.org/index.php/cnca_media/963)

Development & Peace Mining Campaign

<http://www.devpm.org/devpme/eng/education/educationcampaign-eng.html>