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ernment ministries have made overtures to the Guaraní, talking of remediating environmental damage caused by earlier periods of state-led oil extraction.

The Morales government's rationale for this expansion is that these resources belong to the nation and are needed to finance national social policy and cash-transfer programs for the poor, as well as broader public investment. In criticizing opposition to hydrocarbon expansion, Morales said in July:

"What, then, is Bolivia going to live off if some NGOs say 'Amazonia without oil'? They are saying, in other words, that the Bolivian people ought not have money, that there should be neither IDH [a direct tax on hydrocarbons used to fund government investments] nor royalties, and also that there should be no Juancito Pinto, Renta Dignidad nor Juana Azurduy [cash-transfer and social programs]."¹⁵

As Morales's sharp comments illustrate, gas is emerging as a source of tension and conflict between the gov-

Confronting Goldcorp: An Interview With a Guatemalan Activist

By James Rodríguez

Since 2004, Canadian mining giant Goldcorp has been extracting gold from the Guatemalan highlands. Operated by Goldcorp's local subsidiary, Montana Exploradora of Guatemala, the open-pit Marlin mine is located along the border between the municipalities of Sipakapa and San Miguel Ixtahuacán, in the westernmost department of San Marcos. Populated almost entirely by Mayan indigenous peoples, both municipalities have claimed a right to decide on the use of their land, as stipulated by the International Labor Organization's Convention 169, which Guatemala signed on to in 1997.

The Marlin project has helped spark a new wave of peasant protest in Guatemala. Local communities have overwhelmingly disapproved of the mine because of, among other things, irregularities in the company's land acquisition, the threat posed to the water supply by mining, and the very low profits for the local economy (0.5% go to the federal government, 0.5% to the local municipality, and 99% to Goldcorp shareholders). On May 22, hundreds of residents from San Miguel Ixtahuacán came to Guatemala City and marched on Montana Exploradora's office and the Canadian Embassy to protest the health, environmental, and social problems caused by the mine. The date coincided with the Goldcorp shareholders' meeting in Vancouver, Canada.

During the protest, independent photojournalist James Rodríguez interviewed grassroots leader Gregoria Crisanta Pérez. A single mother from the Agel hamlet just a few miles from the Marlin mine, Pérez has been accused by Goldcorp of sabotaging its electric lines. In June, local courts issued an arrest order for Pérez and seven other local women.

Since the interview took place, the conflict in San Miguel Ixtahuacán has sharpened. Hundreds of residents burned



down Goldcorp's machinery in June in response to its continuing expansion, which locals consider land usurpation. After receiving numerous death threats, Pérez and her four young children have at the time of this writing gone into hiding with the help of the local Catholic Church.

Why are you here today protesting in Guatemala City?

We are here today because right now, in Canada, the shareholders and directors are splitting their profits. Meanwhile, here in Guatemala, the people of San Miguel Ixtahuacán continue to live in poverty. We have come to demand our rights. And now, at last, the people of San Miguel Ixtahuacán are starting to wake up.

What is happening in San Miguel Ixtahuacán?

Since the arrival of Montana Exploradora, many problems have come up. For example, dozens of homes have large fissures along the walls due to the explosions from the mine. Our water sources and wells have dried up, and many people suffer from skin diseases, particularly welts, and some of the people who have worked for the company have died mysteriously.

These are some of the reasons we are so worried. This is why we have come today to protest in front of the Canadian Embassy. Today we are also visiting other offices here in the

ernment and different groups in Bolivian society. While the debates around the question of regional autonomy in 2007–8 reflected a (real) argument between Morales's party, the MAS, and regionalists in the eastern Media Luna zone over the control and distribution of resource rents, equally significant arguments are emerging between the MAS government and lowland indigenous movement organizations. Many of these organizations do not categorically oppose extractive industry in Bolivia, but they are

increasingly dismayed that their territorial concerns have been placed on the back burner while the government promotes extraction in precisely the areas where they have territorial claims.

In recent months, Morales and the Central de Pueblos Indígenas del Norte de La Paz exchanged harsh words when the latter requested a consultation process on Petroandina's proposed exploratory operations (FOBOMADE, the national environment and development forum, has

capital so that our voices may be heard, because many of our fundamental rights have been violated. We do not want the mining company to continue operating in San Miguel Ixtahuacán. We are here today because our rivers and wells have been contaminated. We are here also because of our natural resources. Montana is destroying our trees and forests. What we no longer want is for that company to continue damaging our communities in San Miguel Ixtahuacán.

In addition, Montana is buying more land, extending its territory. The people of San Miguel Ixtahuacán live with this tremendous worry. If these people [from the mining company] continue buying up our lands, where are we to go? As indigenous peoples, we live here! We do not want the company to continue buying our land, because if they do, we will be left with nothing. So here, today, in front of the Canadian Embassy, the people of San Miguel Ixtahuacán ask the mining company to leave.

How did the Canadian Embassy receive you?

We were able to meet only with the Canadian ambassador [Leann McKechnie]. From what I understood, they claim that our people were consulted and had asked if we, Maya Mam people, accepted the mining operations in our territory. But the truth is they never consulted us. That was the first of many violations of indigenous rights against the people of San Miguel Ixtahuacán. All of us here today are witnesses that the local people were never consulted.

Do you belong to any organization?

Well, we basically have a small organization without a name. We are just a very small group of women from the Agel hamlet who decided to organize ourselves for the sake of our children. We do this only when we have some spare time.

So are you now organizing others against the mining company?

Since the foreigners first came to take earth samples about 10 years ago, most of us in San Miguel Ixtahuacán did not want the mining company to operate. But mostly due to fear, we had not organized ourselves. Now, however, we are getting orga-

nized and carrying out small community consultations so that the company will cease its operations.

Have you received threats because of your activism?

Yes, I have received many threats. Even today I continue to receive direct threats from the mining company. If it weren't for Montana Exploradora, we would be very happy in our communities of San Miguel Ixtahuacán.

Why do some people in San Miguel Ixtahuacán support the company while others oppose it?

Montana is a very big company and has paid off many community leaders, as well as local auxiliary mayors. Also, there are the few who work for the company; obviously, they and their families support the company. Lately, Montana has also been paying off some key neighbors in order to divide us. In my community of Agel, I know for a fact that the company has paid them 35,000 quetzals [about \$4,300] in exchange for supporting the company's operations. This community division is the main reason that I have been a victim of violence. [*Pérez claims she has been harassed and threatened directly by neighbors who have been paid off by the company. In October 2008, when this interviewer visited Pérez at her home, a neighboring family threatened everyone present with rocks and sticks, and warned the journalist never to interview Pérez again.*]

What the majority of the population wants is for Montana Exploradora to leave San Miguel Ixtahuacán. We demand our rights because we do not want to be poisoned or killed violently by the mining company. We ask the government to please listen to our demands, because we are the legitimate owners of those territories. We are indigenous people, we were born there, and we should die there. But God, not the mining company, should decide our deaths. □

James Rodríguez is an independent Mexican-U.S. photo-journalist based in Guatemala. His work focuses on documenting regional struggles involving land tenure, indigenous rights, and impunity in Central America's post-war era (mimundo.org).