



# MiningWatch Canada

## Mines Alerte

# Newsletter

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### *Sudbury Workshop on Abandoned Mines Co-sponsored by Assembly of First Nations*

“After the Mine: Healing Our Lands and Nations” was a workshop jointly sponsored by the Assembly of First Nations and MiningWatch Canada in Sudbury, Ontario, May 11-13. Participants came from First Nations in all parts of Canada.

Abandoned mines are a serious and immediate danger to human health and the environment. They are already costing Canadians millions of dollars in clean-up, cancers, and lost fishery and farm income, and they stand to cost billions more. At least nine of these sites have been identified by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) on First Nations land. An unknown number of others are on lands of aboriginal use or interest (such as the Adams Mine). Frequently, communities find themselves downstream from toxic sites and are unable to assess the risk or potential damage they may cause.

Abandoned mines present a number of challenges for First



The legacy of the Iron Ore Company of Canada in Schefferville, Innu and Naskapi Nation Territory.

Nations communities. The workshop addressed the growing need to build the capacity of aboriginal communities to deal with problems created by abandoned mines.

It provided opportunities for participants to share their own knowledge and questions, and included a tour of the Falconbridge tailings area, a sharing of resources available to deal with the problem from the Centre on Indigenous Nutrition and Environment, the Indian Law Resource Centre in Montana, the Contaminants Program of the Assembly of First Nations, Northwatch, and Mining Watch Canada, as well as a presentation on law and jurisdictional issues lead by Innu lawyer Armand Mackenzie. There was also an excellent exchange of ideas for future activities and strategic direction on the issues.

The proceedings from the workshop are available from MiningWatch Canada or on our web site.

### *National Workshop on Orphaned/Abandoned Mines Held in Winnipeg*

MiningWatch Canada national co-ordinator Joan Kuyek and a number of our board members and colleagues were in Winnipeg on June 25-28 to attend a National Multi-stakeholder workshop on Orphaned/Abandoned Mines.

The workshop was organized in response to an “action item” from the Mines Ministers’ meeting last September. The Inter-Governmental Working Group — a joint industry-government body which works with the mines ministers — was

instructed to hold a multi-stakeholder workshop to discuss abandoned mines before the next ministers' meeting in 2001 and to report back at that time. A steering committee was established to organize the workshop and Joan was added as an NGO representative.

In the end, the workshop brought together over sixty people. Most were government from the provinces and territories. There were eleven industry reps (including the steering committee), five aboriginal reps (named by the AFN), and a total of eleven NGO/enviro/community people.

## *Placer Dome Loses Porgera Environmental Committee Chair Over "Propaganda"*

On June 15th, MiningWatch Canada joined the Mineral Policy Centre of the US and Australia's Mineral Policy Institute in publicising the resignation of Yati Bun, Chair of Placer Dome's Porgera Environmental Advisory Komiti (PEAK). The well-known and respected Bun resigned over Placer Dome's misuse of him in its "propaganda materials" and lack of action in the cleanup of river pollution from the company's Porgera Mine.

In his resignation letter Bun sharply criticized Placer Dome for failing to implement recommendations aimed at mitigating the impacts of mine waste disposal into the Strickland River at its Porgera mine in Papua New Guinea. At Porgera, Placer Dome dumps mine waste directly into the Strickland River, a practice that is illegal in most developed countries.

Placer Dome has disposed of mine tailings and overburden into the Strickland River system in Papua New Guinea since 1992. After numerous complaints by local villagers and Papua New Guinea environmental groups, and following a 1995 scientific study published by Australia's Mineral Policy Institute indicating serious environmental problems, the Australian Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO) conducted a thorough study of the

The meeting was organized around five themes: Building a National Inventory, Community Perspectives, Standards and Expectations for Reclamation, Ownership and Liability Issues, and Financial Options for Cleanup.

A background paper prepared by CCSG Associates on *Financial Options for the Remediation of Mine Sites* is available from MiningWatch Canada, or on our web site.

The recommendations and proceedings of the workshop will be available to the public after the September Mines Ministers' meeting.

impacts of riverine disposal at the mine.

Placer Dome then created a multi-stakeholder committee called PEAK (Porgera Environmental Advisory Komiti) to oversee the implementation of the CSIRO recommendations. In his resignation letter PEAK's most recent Chairman, Yati Bun, accused the company of using him in "propaganda materials" while doing nothing to mitigate the impacts of their disposal on the Strickland River. "Placer has now had four years to carry out these studies and implement their recommendations, yet nothing has changed from the situation in 1996 when the CSIRO report was started," said Bun.

Bun's resignation was sparked by Placer's unauthorized use of his name in publicity materials. "My conscience cannot tolerate being involved any longer with the PEAK process of expediting the continuation of riverine discharge, as when the history of Porgera is written I do not wish to be the one that oversaw Porgera's impacts and did nothing," he said.

Bun is Executive Director of the Foundation for People and Community Development in Papua New Guinea.

A backgrounder and copies of Bun's resignation letter are available from MiningWatch Canada.

## *Reforms Introduced for Export Development Corporation*

In June, International Trade Minister Pierre Pettigrew announced that he intends to introduce amendments to the Export Development Act this fall to give the Export Development Corporation (EDC) new policies on disclosure and environmental review.

According to the NGO Working Group on the EDC, the proposed changes are good, but not good enough. The long-awaited changes will increase EDC's environmental and public accountability; however, the government has failed to use the best tools available — existing legislation which EDC is currently exempted from. EDC is exempted from the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and the Access to Information Act.

The Auditor-General's report released last month found that EDC correctly implemented its own framework in only

two of twenty-six projects reviewed. Placing EDC under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (CEAA) would give the Environment Minister and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency authority to design and oversee implementation of the environmental framework.

Likewise, although the proposed disclosure framework would be a great improvement in transparency and public information, it still falls short of using the Access to Information Act — the common standard among federal government departments and institutions.

MiningWatch Canada is a member of the NGO Working Group on the EDC, and we will continue to be active when this legislation comes before Parliament, urging that all EDC funding (including mining-related, of course) be subject to rigorous environmental assessment and full public disclosure.

## *Indigenous Leader Abducted in Colombia*

As if to prove the direct human rights implications of EDC funding, one of its most outspoken critics, Kimy Pernia Domicó, was abducted at gunpoint by right-wing paramilitaries on June 2. Pernia had visited Canada on several occa-

sions to speak out against the Urrá hydroelectric project that had flooded his people, the Embera-Katío, out of their ancestral lands in north-western Colombia. The project was partially funded by the EDC, like many other projects around the

world that have led to appalling human rights abuses (see the Reckless Lending reports on our web site for details).

Over a month later, there is still no word of Pernia, and no-one has claimed responsibility for his disappearance. Despite letters and appeals from people around the world, including fifty-six Members of Parliament, the Colombian

Government has refused to take any action.

Please contact ICCHRLA (the Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America) to find out how you can help, at 129 St. Clair Ave. W., Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M4V 1N5; tel. (416) 921-0801; or visit their web site at <http://www.web.net/~icchrla/>.

## Colombia Mining Forum Proposes Changes to Mining Law

In early May, MiningWatch Canada's Communications Coordinator Jamie Kneen traveled to Colombia with Ben Lefebvre of CAW Local 599 (Falconbridge's Kidd Metallurgical Division in Timmins, Ontario) to take part in the third and final forum of the series "*Mining, Environment, and Peace*", organized by SINTRAMINERCOL, the Union of Minercol Workers (Minercol is the Colombian state-owned mining company).

The forums were held in response to an industry-dominated push to reform Colombia's mining laws. They brought together small-scale miners, mineworkers, human rights and environmental activists, legislators, investors, academics, and industry representatives in an effort to define criteria for new legislation that would allow the mining industry to thrive and expand, particularly in value-added and high-employment sectors, while at the same time protecting workers' rights, the environment, and communities' right to decide the course of their own development.

CAW and MiningWatch had been asked to participate for several reasons. SINTRAMINERCOL needed an international presence to make sure that their work would be taken seriously by international investors and by extension, the Colombian government. But they were particularly anxious to have the

experience of other countries and communities in dealing with mining in a globalised economy, and especially Canadian workers, who have both benefitted and suffered. There is a direct connection, since the Devco coal miners in Cape Breton were thrown out of work specifically so Nova Scotia Power's lucrative coal contracts could be filled with cheap Colombian coal, regardless of the labour and human rights conditions. We heard horrific stories of the conditions in the coal mines, where children are taken out of school to work in the mines, and union leaders risk their lives (and are often killed) for organising.

We were able to tell participants that Canadians would never allow the kinds of abuses that communities and workers suffer in Colombia, and that Canadian companies hoping to profit from Colombians' misery will face a rough ride. At the same time, there is ample room for responsible and ethical investment, and Colombia has ample natural riches to provide profitable opportunities for anyone who is willing to respect the communities and the environment.

An interview with a coal miner at one of Drummond's mines in Colombia shows how drastic the situation is. The interview is posted on our web site at [http://www.mining-watch.ca/publications/Drummond\\_Miners\\_Interview.html](http://www.mining-watch.ca/publications/Drummond_Miners_Interview.html).

## "The Ocean is not for Tailings" — Indonesian Conference Opposes Threat to Tropical Oceans

Under large banners with a dead fish as a logo and the slogan "Laut Tidak Untuk Tailing — The Ocean is not for Tailings," some eighty people from island southeast Asia and the Pacific region — Indonesia, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Solomon Islands and New Caledonia — came together in Indonesia to discuss the latest and most rapidly evolving threat to their coastal resources from international mining. This threat is from the ocean dumping of mine waste, known in the industry as Submarine Tailings Disposal (STD).

Submarine tailings disposal is the disposal of mine-mill waste or tailings into the sea through a submerged pipe (see also last issue). Villagers, scientists and government officials from the western Pacific were joined by scientists and NGO representatives from the US, England, Canada and Australia; countries that are home to most of the multinational mining companies (and their consultants) that promote the use of submarine tailings disposal in the Western Pacific region. The practice is effectively illegal in the US and Canada.

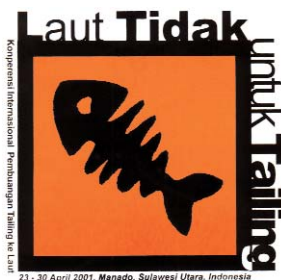
Participants ended the conference by drafting a joint declaration — the *Manado Declaration on Submarine Tailings*

*Disposal* (available on our web site).

Some of the conclusions of the conference were that:

- there is documented evidence for every STD system that has existed to date that shows that these systems have resulted in serious, unanticipated, environmental impacts and/or systems failures. Pipe failures are a particular weakness of STD systems.
- there is a lack of independent scientific research on the impacts of STD.
- environmental consultants that provide cradle to grave services for the mining industry are not independent and frequently play an active role in promoting STD in conferences, publications, and in advising governments. These consultants include Dames and Moore, Rescan, and NSR Consultants.

There is evidence that some authorities in the region are getting concerned about this problem. On May 4, the Indonesian Minister of Environmental Affairs, Sonny Keraf, met with conference participants and announced he would no longer issue permits for submarine tailings disposal. Following a study by the United States Geological Survey, the Philippine government says it plans to turn down Placer Dome's application to dump tailings.



Following the conference, on May 31st, about a hundred people rallied in Manila against submarine tailings disposal. Most were villagers from three islands where it is being proposed. There are also plans to hold a nationwide conference on submarine tailings disposal in the Philippines. Similar follow-

up activities are planned for other counties in the western Pacific and conference participants agreed to continue to work together and support each other's efforts to protect critical marine resources from ocean dumping of mine waste.

## *The "Toxic Thirteen" — Sierra Club of Canada and MiningWatch Canada Call For a Federal Contaminated Sites Program*

The Sierra Club of Canada and MiningWatch Canada held a press conference on June 29th to challenge the federal government to give Canadians a Canada Day gift they and future generations can truly enjoy: a contaminated sites remediation program. In a report titled, "TOXICCanada: 13 Good Reasons to Establish a Clean Canada Fund," the groups highlight one contaminated or toxic site in each province and territory across Canada to illustrate the need for a program to deal with them.

The report aims to draw attention to the growing amount of hazardous waste both produced and imported by Canada — there are thousands of landfills, abandoned industrial sites, and effluent run-off areas where toxics contaminate and leach into the surrounding environment, putting people and nature at risk. Efforts to address contaminated sites when they do occur tend to be *ad hoc* and poorly planned.

The sites listed in each province are: Sleepy Hollow

Landfill in PEI; Argentia in Newfoundland; Miramichi River in New Brunswick; the Sydney Tar Ponds in Nova Scotia; Technoparc in Québec; Beckwith Township in Ontario; Lynn Lake, Manitoba; Uranium City, Saskatchewan; Swan Hills, Alberta; the Tsolum River (Mount Washington Mine) in BC; the Giant Mine in the NWT; Faro Mine in the Yukon; and Resolution Island in Nunavut.

The report and the press conference are part of the continuing efforts of the Green Budget Coalition (of which MiningWatch Canada is a member) to have environmental priorities given a higher profile in the federal government's agenda. Since government priorities are most clearly expressed in the budget, we are seeking to have destructive activities taxed instead of subsidised, as well as specific efforts to clean up toxic sites.

The report is available from MiningWatch Canada.

## *Communications Update:*

All of the reports, etc. mentioned here are available on the MiningWatch Canada web site, or by contacting us directly. As always, visit [www.canada.miningwatch.ca](http://www.canada.miningwatch.ca) to catch up on the latest.

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## *The Curse of El Dorado - Video Available on Canadian Gold Interests in Colombia*

*The Curse of El Dorado* has been made on behalf of SINTRAMINERCOL, the miners' union in Colombia. It is an extremely powerful 35 minute video that captures the essence of what is happening in Colombia, the dispossession of the common people.

The scene is the beautiful San Lucas mountain range in the south of Bolivar, where gold has been mined from pre-Conquest days. A new generation of miners, mostly peasants displaced by violence from other parts of the country, have settled in this remote area. Using hand tools, noxious chemicals and their own back breaking labour the worker-proprietors dig for gold. Their communities are neglected by the Colombian state, there are no roads, no schools, no health-care. All there is, is a tax on gold sales, without the miners seeing any return.

But it is well known that gold carries a curse: it attracts the greedy, those from the north who have appetites without limit. Conquistador Mines Ltd is listed on the Vancouver stock exchange. Through its subsidiary Corona Goldfields, and then through a Colombian lawyer and just one rich family that has never visited the zone, Conquistador has laid claim to the gold deposits. This was in 1997. One year later the paramilitaries were active in the zone, driving the miners from the area.

The film shows a story of mass protest, scores of miners and their families outside the US Embassy in Bogotá, and then a later mass exodus of hundreds navigating on barges to a demonstration in the nearest city, Barrancabermeja. The police took down the identities of people on the protest, supposedly so that they could receive state relief. Relief came, but it turned out to be the vulture of death, the paramilitaries. Edgar Quiroga, the foremost peasant spokesman, was disappeared.

This video is uncompromising. It tells the story though the voices of the oppressed. They have contempt for the corrupt lawyers and parliamentarians who cannot be trusted to defend their country's integrity. The nexus linking multinational capital, the corrupt, neglectful local elite and paramilitary death squads is clear. This is a new war for gold, the new Conquest.

Don't delay. Get hold of this video, show it in your community or union, arrange a meeting around it, and get organised to join with us in resisting paramilitarism and the multinationals' takeover of Colombia.

*The Curse of El Dorado* can be ordered through the LASO Collective for £10 including postage. The video comes in a Spanish and an English version. Video, LASO Collective, P.O. Box 8446, London N17 6NZ.