# Guatemala: Documentaries on mining impacts

We would like to share with our readers an announcement on two documentaries on the disastrous impacts of mining in Guatemala.

The first documentary is called: “Explotación de oro a cielo abierto en Guatemala; Proyecto Marlin” (Open-Cast Gold Mining In Guatemala: The Marlin Project). This documentary addresses the activities of a trans-national mining company that started prospecting for gold in part of the San Marcos territory in 1996.

The Mining Law, passed in 1997, established low royalties for mineral extraction and tax exemption for those importing capital goods and inputs, creating the necessary conditions to make this business very profitable for the companies. Added to this, the World Bank’s International Finance Corporation approved a 45 million dollar loan to partially finance the mine.

The same company is extracting gold in Honduras through a branch company: damages to the environment and to the neighbouring population are high. The mining process is the same as the one to be used in Guatemala. Even before starting exploitation of the mine, serious impacts have been felt on the ecosystem (including a total lack of water in some communities), damage to the health of the population, negative socio-economic consequences and serious violations of Human Rights and of the Indigenous Rights of the Sipakapense People.

The documentary is a case study on how globalization affects the Indigenous Peoples, leaving many losers and few winners.

Because of the wide dissemination given to the documentary, the issue of open cast-mining using chemicals and its serious consequences (on the environment, on health, on human and indigenous peoples’ rights, together with negative socio-economic impacts) has now taken “root” in Guatemala and a new mining bill (more beneficial to the country) is being debated. Civil society is also strongly debating the advisability or not of the mass development of these industries.

The documentary was to be presented in the framework of a Forum on Extractive Industries, Indigenous Peoples and the Environment at the Rafael Landivar University, with the presence of a Nobel Prize winner and German scientists (experts in this matter). The Forum was postponed on two occasions and finally cancelled.

On Saturday 18 July 2005, a Grass-roots Consultation was carried out in the affected zone. A total of 2,415 people voted NO to mining and only 30 people voted YES in favour.

The title of the second documentary is “Explotación de níquel en tierras mayas: Proyecto Fénix” (Nickel Exploitation In Mayan Lands: The Phoenix Project).

This case deals with a Canadian mining company that is developing a major project for nickel extraction from lands belonging to the Mayan People. The operation had been abandoned at the

beginning of the 1980s because of the low international market value of this mineral. From the time of prospecting to mining exploitation, serious violations of Human and Indigenous Peoples' Rights took place.

In December 2004 their mining exploitation licences were renewed and at the same time, a mock sale of the company took place. The new mining process will use sulphuric acid and dump waste water into Lake Izabal, part of a protected ecological area.

Due to the fact that Guatemala has signed International Labour Organization Convention 169, a prior consultation must be made with the indigenous inhabitants of the affected zone to find out whether they accept mining exploitation. The consultation was never made and the inhabitants, in their majority, are against mineral extraction starting up again.

The documentary narrates, through the words of witnesses, the multiple problems that this foreign enterprise caused and continues causing in the Q'quechi' area: violations of Human and Indigenous Peoples' Rights, damage to the health of the inhabitants, environmental disasters and finally, a negative socio-economic impact on the region.

Both documentaries were made by Kristina Hille and Mariano Aiello. Those wishing to obtain copies should address themselves to the following e-mails: blackspringamericas@gmail.com, marianoaiello@gmail.com