
Peru: Forests and people threatened by Canadian mining company

The farmers and peasants from the valleys of Tambogrande, San Lorenzo and the Locuto and Nacho Távera communities in the Department of Piura have received a hard blow with the announcement made by Alejandro Toledo's Prime Minister that the country is to become a leading mining country. This does not consider the decision of the populations settled in the area for hundreds of years.

In 1999 the Peruvian government and the Canadian company Manhattan Sechura S.A. signed an agreement granting the mining company 89 thousand hectares of land around the town of Tambogrande in the Department of Piura in northern Peru, for mining exploitation. The transnational company Manhattan Minerals Corp. (of Canadian origin), intends to exploit a poly-metallic bed as an open cast mine. The building of the mine will require approximately 25,000 people to be resettled, the course of a river to be changed and will cause the destruction of the Prosopis (algarrobo) forests existing in the zone.

The population of Tambogrande lives on agriculture. They reject mining activities in the zone due to the risks they imply and have launched an aggressive campaign to prevent the project being implemented.

José Valeriano Márquez Nima sits on a sandy hill in Locuto and looks towards the horizon. He observes the river Piura and the town of Tambogrande and then turns his eyes to the vast Prosopis forest and the pastures where they take their animals and where they walk every day to collect Prosopis legumes, the economic support for nearly 1,000 peasants from the community of Apostol Juan Bautista de Locuto.

Prosopis legume is a product in demand regionally and nationally and is preferred as fodder for fattening cattle and for dairy cattle. The legume from Piura is marketed in the departments of Lima, La Libertad, Lambayeque, Tumbes and Cajamarca. Its production is more profitable than the production of firewood and charcoal.

The families settled in the Communities of Locuto and Nacho Távora that will be affected by the mining activities carried out by the Manhattan Minerals Corp. project, obtain a significant part of their income (around 50%) from the sale of Prosopis legume and of animals bred in the woods, enabling them to satisfy most of their basic needs for food, clothing and education. Seventy percent of the population settled in this way, not only conserve the woods, but also manage them soundly, thus contributing to maintaining the ecological balance of the environment.

In spite of the fact that the economic powers have loaded their batteries and are using all means possible to find acceptance in the community, there is strong resistance on the part of the population of Tambogrande, San Lorenzo and Locuto, who base their economy on agriculture. The farmers have organised themselves and have carried out various demonstrations. Some 28 thousand citizens have signed a memorandum that the Municipality will submit to the Executive, requesting the revocation of the supreme decrees granting the concession to Manhattan Minerals Corp and asking that their lands be declared not subject to seizure.

It is important to note that the serious impacts generated by Canadian mining companies throughout the world has been documented and analysed in a joint work carried out by the Forest Peoples Programme, the Philippine Indigenous Peoples Link and the World Rainforest Movement. The results of this study have been summarised in the publication "Undermining the Forests. The need to control transnational mining companies: a Canadian case study".

Those wishing to obtain a copy may request it from the Forest Peoples Programme office, e-mail info@fppwrn.gn.apc.org. The publication will shortly be available in our web site.