VENEZUELA: more on Imataca

The Venezuelan Guayana Corporation (CVG) and Venezuela's Ministry of Energy and Mines (MEM) are shown to have given questionable authorizations to 12 ghost companies to mine within the Imataca Rainforest Reserve. At the same time, the Ministry of the Environment and Renewable Resources (MARNR) is claimed to have topped the irregularities by handing out permits to gold mining companies that didn't even bother to back up their bids for lots showing studies on the impact of mining activities on the eco-system.

All these and more revelations are emerging from the House of Representatives' Energy and Mines Committee. It is clear that there is complete and utter disorder in the mining sector and that the MEN and the CVG have shown a patent disregard for legalities.

Yet the fact remains that the original argument put forward by the Venezuelan government (Apertura Minera, May 14, 1997) in favour of legal mining concessions and contracts was to put a halt on existing anarchy and
illegal mining activities used by the wildcat miners (“garimpeiros”). According to the Committee's report, at least 12 ghost companies "gave addresses that didn't correspond with any mining companies." The allegedly "faceless" companies are named as: Universal Mining Company (15,000 hectares), Mirko & Marquez, Minetoca (1,336 hectares), Suramericana de Mineria, Representaciones El Rama, Minerales Yuruani, Inversiones Vipago, Inversora Mael (1,250 hectares), and Suarez Concessions I & II.

According to data at his disposal, Congressional Energy and Mines Committee President Bernardo Alvarez says that even if prior to the Ordinance Law, some 436 lots had been granted in the Imataca Rainforest Reserve, this doesn't tie in with CVG and MEM figures and the Ministry of Economic Coordination and Planning (Cordiplan), where only 300 lots are registered.

Even though it is expressly forbidden to sell titles to third parties(without special permission from the CVG), the following companies were sold to third parties without special permission: Krysos Mining (10,076 hectares, General Mining, Minera Alda (2,000 hectares), Mining Consortium Miamo, Latinvan Metal, Gold Reserve de Venezuela, Minera La Fortuna, Minera Aurus, Tecno-Geo, Vetas de Vuelva Caras, Mining Consorcium Laguna de Santa Rita, Minera 11-90, Zuplan Development, Minera 41087, Minera 6560433, Goldwana Investments, Multioca, Minera Internoro, Contigol, Minera Mosbel, Minera Uwe, Corpoaurifera, Minera LL (8,141 hectares), Mineras Estratos, Desarrollo Minero, Corporacion Minera Cuyuni and Greenwich Resources (14,998 hectares).

The Committee recommends that a list of detected ghost companies be sent to the Attorney General's Office "to request the suspension of contracts or concessions" as well as the intervention of MEM's Mines Board and the CVG's Mining Vice-Presidency to determine its administrative and managerial situation.

It also asks that there should be an accelerated investigation to determine the implication of civil servants in granting concessions and contracts, supervision, control and monitoring and to apply

corresponding punishments. It is also requested that the Finance Ministry should take legal action against companies that refused to answer the questionnaire, violating Article No.160 of the Constitution.

Source: AMIGRANSA, 24/11/97.