
Costa Rica: against mining activities

About 30 transnational corporations are in the process of developing projects for gold exploration and exploitation in Costa Rica. Included in this list of mining companies are the Canadian Placer Dome Inc. and American Barrick Gold, listed among the six largest gold mining corporations in the world.

Such activities will affect protected areas of enormous ecological and cultural value as well as their influential areas and buffer zones. The area that has been solicited or granted as concession for open pit gold mining activity comes to approximately 408,000 hectares, which is equivalent to 8% of the Costa Rican national territory!

The bi-national basin of the San Juan River -a natural border between Costa Rica and Nicaragua and the most extensive watershed found in Central America- is one of the most threatened areas, since 250,000 hectares of it have been asked in concession for exploration. The ecological and cultural richness of this region has stimulated the creation of a network of protected areas on both sides of the border, called the International System of Protected Areas for Peace (SIAPAZ). This area shelters the main remnant of tropical rain forest on the Caribbean side of Central America and is home to unique species, some of which are in danger of extinction, as the manatee, the green macaw and the mountain almond.

Other regions of the country are under threat as well. There exists the possibility that a series of open pit mines will be operated along the Tilaran Mountain Range, in an area of 130,000 hectares of the Northern Pacific Region, which shelters various protected areas, such as the Biological Reserves of Monteverde and Alberto Brenes, and the Arenal National Park. The cultural and natural heritage of the Talamanca Mountain Range, declared Reserve of the Biosphere and Heritage of Humankind by UNESCO in 1982, is also menaced. This region is the territory of the Bribri and Cabecar indigenous peoples, who have organized themselves in order to defend their livelihoods.

The National Front Against Open Pit Gold Mining (Frente) in Costa Rica -a newly created coalition made up of environmental, human rights, campesino, indigenous, student, religious, communities and women's organizations- is monitoring this process and taking actions to defend the menaced territories.

Source: National Front Against Open Pit Gold Mining (Frente). September 1997.