



Chalatenango Free of Mining

International Observer Delegation: Community Consultations in El Salvador
September 15-22, 2014

Since 2005 communities and organizations grouped under the National Roundtable against Metallic Mining in El Salvador, La Mesa, have fiercely opposed attempts by foreign corporations to obtain mineral exploitation licenses to begin industrial scale gold mining. As the national government has failed to guarantee a permanent mining ban, mining-affected regions are seeking to assert local autonomy through a process of community consultations that will gauge the desire of local communities in to live in territories free of mining.

This delegation aims to bring international presence to observe community consultations in the department of Chalatenango, El Salvador. Participants in the delegation can expect to:

1. *Observe and verify community consultations on mining led by local organizations in the Chalatenango region of El Salvador.*
2. *Become familiar and gain an overall understanding of the impacts of large scale mining operations in El Salvador and the different dimensions of the anti-mining struggle.*
3. *Engage in knowledge exchange sessions with national and international environmental activists and members of local communities affected by mining.*
4. *Increase long term solidarity with communities leading struggles against extractive industries in El Salvador and around the world.*

MINING IN EL SALVADOR

The introduction of mining projects in El Salvador has been met with a public consensus that the country's fragile environment is not able to sustain industrial scale extractive projects. The size of country's territory, over-population, high vulnerability to natural disasters, the precarious condition of water resources, and unmitigated amounts of toxic waste already contaminating the natural environment are factors that have contributed to sway public opinion against mining. Public opinion polls have shown that over 60 percent of the population is opposed to mining.

Widespread opposition to mining has made it possible to halt the implementation of mineral exploitation projects so far. However, many challenges remain to ensure that the mining industry is prevented from increasing environmental vulnerability in the country. The Ministry of Economy through the Direction of Mining and Hydrocarbons maintains 29 active exploration licenses, and applications for over 60 exploration projects are currently in process. A law to prohibit mining has been introduced by civil society organizations at the legislative assembly but the government has failed to discuss it, maintaining only a de facto moratorium without legislative backing. Despite of the fact that that two mining companies have sued El Salvador for over 400 million dollars under the ICSID, an international trade tribunal housed at the World Bank, El Salvador has continued to sign trade agreements that contain investor-state clauses that give corporations the right to profit over public interest, and to sue in foreign courts if their rights to profit are interfered with.

The failure of the current government to approve a mining ban has required civil society organizations to sustain a permanent campaign to ensure mining companies seeking licenses to extract resources are held back and to maintain public pressure for a law that ultimately prohibits mining. Organized under National Roundtable against Mining in El Salvador, civil society organizations have led a national campaign against mining and have supported local communities to develop creative strategies to resist the presence of mining.

The communities most affected by mining projects in the country are the northern farming communities of the departments of Santa Ana, Chalatenango, Cabañas, Morazán and La Union. All these communities already feel the presence of mining companies in their territories and have developed organized resistance to extractive projects according to their particular circumstances.

PRELIMINARY PROGRAM

Monday, September 15

AM – delegates arrive in San Salvador

PM – orientation and get to know the other delegates

Tuesday, September 16

AM - Travel to la Union and visit the San Sebastian mine. Engage with community members and learn about the environmental impact of a former mine on local living conditions.

PM - Travel to Cabañas

Wednesday, September 17

AM - Engage with local community leaders and learn about the impacts of Pacific Rim Mining

PM - Visit the town of San Isidro and talk to community members

Thursday, September 18

AM - Debriefing session, delegates coordinate for their participation in the afternoon's event

PM – Forum on worldwide extraction issues with participation of local leaders and of delegates representing their different struggles.

Friday, September 19

Visit Asuncion Mita, Guatemala to discuss the impact of mining on Guatemalans and Salvadorans.

Saturday, September 20

Receive observation training for Sunday's community consultation and meet with the mayor

Sunday, September 21

Participate as international observers in a community consultation process in Chalatenango.

Monday, September 22

AM - Press conference, evaluation and follow up activities.

PM – return home

Cost

In country expenses: \$600
International Flight: \$600-\$900**

**Subject to change based on delegation size*

***International flight is to be purchased by each delegate individually*

How to Participate

This is a general call for participants that may come from any region and any background and that may be interested in learning about El Salvador, although the focus is on involving individuals who are connected to related struggles internationally, such as the anti-fracking struggle, and Tar Sands pipeline struggle, the First Nations environmental rights struggle, and others.

If you are interested in participating or have questions, please contact:

Catie Johnston (United States)

U.S. El Salvador Sister Cities Co-Coordinator

sistercities.elsalvador@gmail.com

(503) 7596-6341

www.elsalvadorsolidarity.org

René Guerra Salazar (Canada)

Executive Director, SalvAide

T: 613-233-6215 | F: 613-233-7375

Email: director@salvaide.ca

Skype: salvaidecanada

Facebook: SalvAide

www.salvaide.ca

The deadline to sign up is **August 15, 2014**.

If you are interested in participating but are concerned about financial barriers, please do not hesitate to contact us. Some scholarships are available, especially to individuals involved in local environmental and anti-extraction industry work.