

University of New Mexico
UNM Digital Repository

NotiCen

Latin America Digital Beat (LADB)

4-9-2015

Conflicts Involving Mining Projects Persist in Dominican Republic

Crosby GirÃ³n

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen>

Recommended Citation

GirÃ³n, Crosby. "Conflicts Involving Mining Projects Persist in Dominican Republic." (2015). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/10241>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiCen by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Conflicts Involving Mining Projects Persist in Dominican Republic

by Crosby Girón

Category/Department: Dominican Republic

Published: 2015-04-09

In March, the Continental Encounter Against Mining and in Favor of Popular Sovereignty took place in Guatemala. As part of the event, a peaceful march took place in which representatives from Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Peru, Dominican Republic, and South Africa participated.

During the encounter, Domingo Abreu Collado, a member of the Dominican Republic's Asamblea Nacional Ambiental (ANA), told local community media that there is a geological formation along the island known as the central mountain range or cordillera central that comprises 20% of its entire territory where around 30 large mining companies are searching for gold, silver, and copper and are seeking to obtain mining licenses from the government.

Abreu said these mining projects would have a detrimental impact on the country's water and land resources. "We regard the search for gold, silver, and copper on the island as a threat because it has had a devastating impact on other countries. In Romania and Canada, for example, this type of mining activity is highly unsafe because it uses cyanide. Added to this, these projects destroy our soil and leave many problems that future generations will inherit," he said.

Among the 30 companies seeking to develop the mining industry in the Dominican Republic are Gold Corp, Barrick Gold, M&M, Mayescorp, Enviro Gold, and Gold West ([NotiCen, Aug. 29, 2013](#)).

Therefore, the ANA is working to unify the environmentalist movement throughout the island, but its main ally is the campesino movement. "Campesinos are the group most at risk because land and water pollution will lead to the loss of their animals, which is already occurring," said Abreu.

Abreu said that, although there are currently no laws criminalizing social movements, he wouldn't be surprised if such a law was approved in the short term.

Since the government has not taken the negative effects of mining into account, Abreu believes that civil society should keep a watchful eye on future developments in the mining sector. "Governments don't understand these arguments. Their development proposals are very much in line with those of the corporate actors that are mainly interested in investments that will give them the greatest possible return on their investments," says Abreu.

It was recently reported that the Pueblo Viejo Dominicana Corporation (PVDC), a local subsidiary of Gold Corp and Barrick Gold, is causing "alarming levels of pollution" in large areas of Dominican territory by using toxic substances as part of the mining process.

Pueblo Viejo is a world-class mining reserve and one of the largest undeveloped gold deposits in the world. Rafael Guillén Beltré, leader of the Paz Dominicana organization, said thousands of families that live in Sánchez Ramírez province and other parts of the country are the victims of a "silent genocide" perpetrated by these mining companies.

Guillén said, "Mining operations are causing alarming levels of pollution from the use of cyanide and other substances that are lethal for human health. Plants and animals have been affected, and all the residents in the areas surrounding the mine breathe high levels of cyanide."

The Paz Dominicana organization has unsuccessfully tried to stop the mining companies by judicial means and has been subjected to death threats by the PVDC, says Guillén.

The reasons behind current mining boom

It is clear that the Dominican government and the private sector are singing from the same hymn sheet when it comes to promoting foreign investment in the country. In fact, a year ago, the Centro de Exportación e Inversión de la República Dominicana (CEI-RD), the Dirección General de Minería (DGM), and the Ministerio de Energía y Minas agreed on a plan to facilitate the investment flow and find new markets for mining exports.

In addition, the mining sector makes an important contribution to capital flows in the Dominican economy. That's what Jean Alain Rodríguez, director of the CEI-RD, talked about when the agreement was signed. According to official figures, in 2013, the mining industry grew by 132%, accounting for 0.9% of the country's GDP. Added to this, the value of mining exports grew by 18.2%. Rodríguez said these investments generate employment and well-being in the surrounding communities.

Nevertheless, Abreu says that, even though the private sector and the government cite these figures as proof that the mining industry is good for the country's development, the communities have a different perspective on the issue. Although the companies have generated revenue for the state and insist that they are operating in a responsible manner, local communities' opposition to these projects has increased.

During the past few months, opposition leaders and social organizations have waged a continuous opposition to these activities. The Falconbridge and XStrata Niquel mining corporations are among those that have been subjected to the strongest criticism. In fact, the Observatorio de Conflictos Mineros de América Latina (OCMAL) stated that the conflict regarding mining development in Loma Miranda had turned into "a pulse between the state and popular power".

President Danilo Medina recently vetoed a bill that sought to turn Loma Miranda into a national park. He argued that he had serious doubts about "the country's international obligations regarding foreign investment, as well as issues related to compatibility with the Constitution and domestic law."

However, says Abreu, as the economies of the great powers have been affected by the global financial crisis, the global demand for precious minerals has increased, and, in the case of Latin American countries, that demand has led to social conflict and environmental damage.

The protests waged by opposition groups have been the barometer to measure levels of conflict. A number of deaths have been reported during the protests, and, in several communities near mining projects, rivers have been polluted and high levels of heavy metals have been detected in the inhabitants of the area.

-- End --