

via US mail <b>Abg. Agapito Alexander Rodríguez</b> Executive Director of INHGEOMIN Honduran Institute of Geology and Mining	via US mail <b>Abg. Ericka Lorena Molina</b> Sub-Director of Mining, INHGEOMIN Honduran Institute of Geology and Mining
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June 24, 2020

Dear Executive Director of INHGEOMIN and Sub-Director of Mining:

We are writing to express our concern about attacks on civil liberties against members of the **Comité Ambientalista de Azacualpa** (Azacualpa Environmental Committee) in Azacualpa, municipality of La Unión, Copán Department.

In their attempts to slow the spread of the corona/COVID-19 virus, members of the Comité Ambientalista have been peacefully blocking workers' access to the Sand Andrés gold mine. Already a point of controversy in the community for several years because of environmental harms, now COVID-19 is another reason that local residents oppose the mine. There are reports that mining operations around the world are directly helping spread the corona/COVID-19 virus amongst mining company employees and surrounding communities.

On June 17, committee members collaborated with ASONOG (Association of Non-Governmental Organizations of Honduras) to provide COVID-19 related emergency food relief to local villagers. The following day, two women from Azacualpa arrived at the home of **Maria Ermita Rodríguez**, who assisted in the food aid distribution. They insulted and threatened her, warning that there would be consequences for her, her son and others supporting the Comité Ambientalista.

Something as benign as distributing food has become highly political in this divided community. For several years, the Comité Ambientalista has been organizing to shut down the gold mine, which is owned and operated by US- and Canada-based Aura Minerals and its Honduran subsidiary MINOSA (Minerales de Occidente SA). Like other large scale open-pit mechanized mines, its operations leach deadly chemicals such as cyanide into water sources. There have been at least 37 documented cases of persons in La Unión contaminated with mercury, arsenic, and lead in their blood and urine.

Aura Minerals/MINOSA has created even more controversy since 2016 by digging up graves from a 200-year-old cemetery and moving the bodies. The removal of the cemetery is due to the ever-increasing expansion of territory of its mining operations, expansion that is backed by government authorities and security forces. Those who oppose mining operations are spied on and threatened. Many opponents (at least 19) have been criminalized. At least one has fled Azacualpa and sought refuge in the U.S. because of death threats he received while active in the Comité Ambientalista.

To protect the civil liberties and physical health of the residents of Azacualpa, we strongly urge you to

- order a suspension of mining operations during the national health emergency
- suspend any approval of requests for expanding the geography of the San Andrés Mine until local communities are consulted and give their approval
- investigate the threats made against Maria Ermita Rodríguez and her family, with particular attention to any connections with employees of the San Andrés mine, local police, and local political authorities

Sincerely,

  
 Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
 Co-Coordinator

  
 Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Lica. Karla Cueva, Secretary of State for Human Rights Affairs ~ via email  
 Dr. Roberto Herrera Cáceres, National Commissioner for Human Rights ~ via email  
 Ing. Elvis Yovanni Rodas, Secretaría de Energía, Recursos Naturales, Ambiente y Minas de Honduras ~ via email  
 CESPAD: Centro de Estudio para la Democracia ~ via email  
 ASONOG: Asociación de Organizaciones No Gubernamentales de Honduras ~ via email  
 Rodrigo Barbosa, President & CEO of Aura Minerals ~ via US mail and email  
 MINOSA ~ via US mail  
 María Dolores Agüero, Ambassador of Honduras to the US ~ via email and US mail  
 Joel Hernández, Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email and US mail  
 Colleen Hoey, Chargé d'Affaires, US Embassy in Honduras ~ via email  
 Nate Rettenmayer, Political Officer, US Embassy in Honduras ~ via email  
 David Tagle, Honduras Desk, US State Dept ~ via email  
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, González, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Ryan ~ via email

18 junio 2020\_RightsAction\_Honduras

**The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter:**