

Agapito Alexander Rodríguez Executive Director of INHGEOMIN Honduran Institute of Geology and Mining	Liliam Lizeth Rivera Minister of MiAmbiente Honduras Energy, Natural Resources, Environment, and Mining
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December 2, 2021

Dear Executive Director Rodríguez and Minister Rivera:

We are writing to express our concern about the **militarization of the Azacualpa community cemetery** in La Unión, Copán Department, by members of the Armed Forces and the National Police. The security forces have been deployed to ensure the exhumations of graves, to facilitate expansion of the San Andrés gold mine, which is owned by US- and Canada-based Aura Minerals and operated by its Honduran subsidiary MINOSA (Minerales de Occidente SA).

For several years, the Azacualpa Environmental Committee has been organizing to shut down the San Andrés gold mine. 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. There is also a strong correlation between mining operations and landslides.

Since at least 2014, MINOSA has expressed its intent to expand operations to a hill in Azacualpa on which sits the 200-year-old Maya-Chortí cemetery. Exhumations have occurred off and on until one year ago when the Supreme Court of Justice issued an order to stop the exhumations. Despite that order, in October of this year a judge in Santa Rosa de Copán issued an “urgent order” to exhume, transfer and rebury the skeletal remains.

The legal firm Estudios para la Dignidad has expressed several points of concern about deploying the military, which violates the judgment issued by the Supreme Court of Justice in November 2020. It ignores the will of a community that does not want the bodies of their relatives exhumed. Moreover, there is historic precedent of violence being perpetrated on communities who resist when the military combine forces with the private security forces employed by mining companies.

The removal of the cemetery is clearly due to the ever-increasing expansion of MINOSA’s mining operations, backed by government authorities and security forces. Those who oppose mining operations are spied on and threatened. Many opponents (at least 35) have been criminalized.

To protect the civil liberties and physical health of the residents of Azacualpa, and to respect the sacred grounds of their ancestral cemetery, we strongly urge you to

- order a suspension of the exhumation of the cemetery in La Unión, Copán
- order a suspension of mining operations during the national COVID 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 through an inclusive process
- investigate the threats made against community activists, with particular attention to any connections with MINOSA employees, local police, and local political authorities

Sincerely,


 Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Co-Coordinators


 Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Aura Minerals: Rodrigo Barbosa (President & CEO), Sofia Aguilar (Gen. Mgr for Community, Institutional and Legal Relations) ~ via US mail and email
 MINOSA ~ via US mail
 Luis Suazo Barahona, Ambassador of Honduras to the US ~ via email and US mail
 Joel Hernández García, Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email and US mail
 Isabel Albaladejo Escribano, Representative to Honduras of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OACNUDH) ~ via email
 Alice Shackelford, UN Resident Coordinator in Honduras, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ~ via email
 Bufete de Estudios para la Dignidad / Office of Studies for Dignity ~ via email
 US Embassy in Honduras: Colleen Hoey, Chargé d’Affaires; Nate Rettenmayer, Political Officer; Ariel Jahner, Human Rights Officer ~ via email
 US State Department: Molly Runyon, Honduras Desk Officer ~ via email
 US Senators Brown & Portman ~ via email
 US Representatives Beatty, Gibbs, González, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Ryan ~ via email

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