

<p><b>Agapito Alexander Rodríguez</b> Executive Director of INHGEOMIN Honduran Institute of Geology and Mining</p>	<p><b>Liliam Lizeth Rivera</b> Minister of MiAmbiente Honduras Energy, Natural Resources, Environment, and Mining</p>
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April 11, 2022

Dear Executive Director Rodríguez and Minister Rivera:

We are writing to express our deep concerns about the **continuous destruction of the 200-year-old Indigenous Maya-Chortí cemetery** in the Azacualpa community in La Unión, Copán Department. We have learned of recent reports about the use of heavy machinery and planned detonations on the cemetery hill, in spite of several court orders prohibiting any such operations.

The cemetery is at the center of a longstanding controversy over gold mining. For several years, the Azacualpa Environmental Committee has been organizing to shut down 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). Like other large scale open-pit mechanized mines, its operations leach deadly chemicals such as cyanide into water sources. There is also a strong correlation between mining operations and landslides.

For at least ten years, MINOSA has expressed plans to expand the San Andrés gold mine. To reach the gold reserves that are found under the cemetery hill, MINOSA, in conjunction with the government, has been exhuming graves and destroying the Indigenous cemetery with plans to use dynamite to better access the minerals. Besides the illegal exhumations and destruction of the cemetery, there have been repeated concerns raised about security forces and other people hired by the mining company to attack and violently detain those who oppose the destruction of the cemetery.

Since 2020, and as recent as in February of this year, the Santa Rosa de Copán Court of Appeals has issued many orders to stop the harmful operations, but to date MINOSA has ignored all of these orders. On March 30, 2022, the State of Honduras ordered MINOSA to stop its operations. Given the history of this case, we are skeptical that MINOSA will abide. We are deeply troubled by the indifference with which the mining company reacts to the issued court orders.

To protect the local Maya Chortí community from further acts of violence and destruction and to permanently terminate the mining operations on the Azacualpa cemetery, **we strongly urge you to:**

- order an immediate and unavoidable suspension of the destruction and detonation of the cemetery in La Unión, Copán
- order an immediate retreat of the mining company and all its affiliates, including armed forces, from the cemetery hill and the local community
- revoke any outstanding mining approvals of MINOSA and order a suspension of any actions to expand the geography of the San Andrés mine until local communities are sufficiently consulted and give their approval through an inclusive process

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  
Carlos Bernal Pulido, 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, Brown, 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:**