

## HONDURAS

# Court rules against gold mining company, orders suspension of exhumations of 200-year-old Maya-Chortí cemetery

For several months, IRTF has been reading reports on the militarization of the Azacualpa community cemetery in Honduras, where Aura Minerals (headquartered in Toronto and Miami), backed by its Honduras subsidiary MINOSA, has been performing illegal exhumations to facilitate the expansion of the San Andrés gold mine.

### RRN letter 02 DEC 2021 - excerpt

"We are expressing our concerns about the **militarization of the 200-year-old 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. Exhumations of the mostly indigenous Maya-Chortí graves have occurred off and on for several years. But one year ago 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."

### RRN letter 25 JAN 2022 - excerpt

"During the final weeks of President Hernández's term, Miami-based Aura Minerals seemed eager to move full steam ahead with its desecration of a 200-year-old Maya Chortí cemetery in Azacualpa. The military and National Police were deployed to facilitate Aura's exhumation of graves so that they can get their hands on gold reserves underneath. Community residents trying to protect their deceased relatives' final resting place are threatened, detained, and beaten. We echo the demands of the residents of Azacualpa to (1) order a suspension of the exhumations of graves in the cemetery, (2) order a retreat of the military and police from the cemetery hill, and (3) reassure the community's access to the cemetery."

## GOOD NEWS

The Court of Appeals in Santa Rosa de Copán ordered on February 8, 2022 the suspension of the exhumation and destruction of the Maya-Chortí cemetery in Azacualpa, Copán Department, after local rights organizations like *Bufete Estudios Para la Dignidad* kept urging the court to take legal actions against the illegal mining operations of Aura Minerals/MINOSA. The company had previously been exhuming and transferring graves secretly at night and taken control of the cemetery with the help of military forces to avoid protests by the local community.

With this verdict, the court re-affirmed the illegality with which the mining company has been destroying the Maya-Chortí cemetery in order to expand operations of the San Andrés gold mine.

IRTF welcomes the actions taken by local rights organizations and the ruling of the Court of Appeals. Now it is a question of enforcement. There are still reports (with documented evidence) of illegal excavation being conducted by the mining company. Nonetheless, this ruling by the Court of Appeals is an important political sign and a step forward to stopping Aura Minerals/MINOSA's illegal mining operations on the ancestral lands of the Maya-Chortí people in western Honduras .

### Rapid Response Network

InterReligious Task Force on Central America  
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IRTF calls together the people of northeast Ohio to walk in solidarity with oppressed peoples of Central America and Colombia to achieve peace, justice, human rights, and systemic transformation through nonviolence.

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