

To protest the World Bank's Pro-Mining Conference last May, the Latin American Project of Minewatch (UK) and Acción Ecológica (Ecuador) organized a parallel conference in Quito. The alternative conference attracted more than sixty participants from Indigenous communities and NGOs in nine countries (Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Costa Rica, Panama, Nicaragua, Chile, Brazil and Ecuador). Due to its regional importance, the event was discussed on television and in national newspapers of several of the participating countries, thus contributing to the general debate on mining.

According to many delegates, the benefits of mining have yet to appear. "It may sound quaint to say that communities don't want the type of "modern" development that mining brings, but its consequences for us are often literally a matter of the life or death of the community" said Luis Robelino of Ecuador. "Why

basins of the Huallaga, Mantero and Alto Marañon rivers due to mining. He also revealed to the audience strategies used by the multi-nationals in order to avoid discussing the result of environmental studies, as well as their policy of securing exclusive access to rivers through the acquisition of large extensions of land. As a result, communities have seen their rivers confiscated, with drinking water rationed to every other day during the summer months and to only a few hours a day in the winter.

Gladys Marquéz, from the Peruvian organization LABOR, spoke about their long battle against the Southern Peru Corporation. The air in the city of Ilo is highly polluted and each day several spells of heavy mist are experienced, causing breathing difficulties among the population and forcing them to remain indoors until the fog disperses. Levels of SO₂ in the air are 30 times the guidelines established by the WHO. In addition, arsenic and lead levels exceed those found in the Tacoma smelter of the company in Washington State, an indication that the corporation applies different environmental standards in different countries. The effect of these air pollutants is not restricted to Ilo alone. A video shown demonstrated that as the air travels it affects an extension of approximately 30 thousand hectares, the smog being responsible in 1995 for destroying about 4 thousand hectares destined for agriculture use.

It is worth mentioning that the World Bank conference included the participation of Mr. Hans Flury, a spokesman for the corporation. In his speech he did not address any of the environmental problems for which the Southern Peru Corporation is responsible.

Ecuador: Carlos Zorilla spoke in defense of the Cotacachi-Cayapas ecological forest reserve (Ecuador's last remaining coastal rainforest), which is affected by the mining activity around the buffer zones, leading to further invasion of land and deforestation of thousands of hectares of pristine woods. Local delegates from this area spoke of their frustration over the past five years, due to the refusal of Bishimetals to provide the Indigenous community with the requested environmental study. Despite the

absence of a management plan for the activities, the company has built a 9km road through primary forest, and dug various holes near the Junin river, which two years later were gushing 300 liters of water per minute. As no environmental management or contingency plans were ever formulated, the community is unable to hold the company responsible for the damages. Shortly after the conference ended, local inhabitants organized several pacific actions with the aim of confiscating the equipment and occupying the installations of the company.

Brazil: Marina Kahn, from the Instituto Socio Ambiental spoke about the implications of the privatization of the state mining company Vale do Rio Doce (CVRD). The Indigenous communities will be affected as the company previously contributed up to US \$26 million annually to the local budget. The fate of the some 17,000 Indigenous people who live within the forest region may also depend on the goodwill of the new owners. Thirteen Indigenous groups distributed in 24 reserves could

The Parallel Conference on Mining and the Community Quito, Ecuador May 7th-9th 1997

◆ by **Glevys Rondon** THIS ARTICLE ALSO APPEARED IN THE MINEWATCH BULLETIN: HIGHER VALUES

should we accept something that is imposed on us by institutions like the World Bank, on behalf of a system which benefits only rich people in the north and in the large cities of the south, and which wastes the materials it uses and destroys the communities and land from which they are extracted?" he added.

During the parallel event, Indigenous and NGO delegates discussed what they felt to be the true cost of mining and their own real needs. Amongst other topics, representatives were briefed on the role of the World Bank in the new impetus to open up mining in Latin America, and the strategies used by corporations to win over or to divide communities. Several case studies were presented from mining operations in various countries of the region. Among the most striking were:

Peru: Miguel Palacino, spokesman for the "Frente de Defensa Ecológico de las Comunidades Campesinas y Pueblos de la Zona Alto Andina" referred to the contamination of the

be affected by the Carajas Project. The pressures to "develop" resources could herald major consequences for these communities as well as the biodiversity of the region.

Chile: Urbano Alfaro, a diver from a small fishing village in the region of Antofagasta, discussed the impact of the Minería Escondida Ltd, whose activities have led to contamination of the fish and shellfish they depend on for their living. The company boasts that it produces 80 thousand tons of copper per year, using the most advanced technology in the world. In his exposition, he added that the company fails to explain that no other country was willing to accept the plant due to the enormous environmental consequences. The treatment of the ore involves discharging into the sea highly toxic chemicals, which among other problems have raised the temperature of the waters and produced deformities, especially in prawns. The problems do not circumscribe themselves to the sea. The company transports these toxins right through the town in ordinary trucks which have had no modification. The villagers' greatest fear is that in the event of a brake failure or crash, these chemicals will escape, contaminating the air, soil and even causing an explosion.

Again, at the World Bank Conference the company's representative concentrated on the economic benefits, highlighting that the production of "La Escondida" represents 6% of the total exported by the country. Furthermore, as there are plans for increasing production, Chile will become a world leader in the production of copper.

Resolution: Towards the end of the conference the delegates prepared a statement which was read out to the press during a speech in the Congress Press Office. The document, known as the "Declaración de Quito", rejects "mining activity in Latin America and the pernicious role of the World Bank in promoting and financing mining in the region". Delegates asserted "the right of Indigenous people and communities to continue their harmonious ways of life and decide their own destiny".

Nor were delegates in agreement with the Bank's macro-economic policy. "We

reject the neo-liberal model of the 'free market', which serves the interests of a global minority whose objective is the indiscriminate consumption of resources and which is bringing the millions of people surplus to the system to the edge of extinction", states the declaration.

The delegates also promised to carry out wide-ranging educational campaigns on individual and collective rights, and to strengthen the coordination of the struggle against mining at the local, national and regional level.



Their demands can be summarized as urging national governments to prioritize quality of life, food, security and environmental preservation above anything else., they requested that alternatives to mining should be sought and that all mining development money be channeled to other sectors of the economy managed by communities.

World Bank Conference:

Delegates from Latin American NGOs attending the World Bank Conference expressed their reservations about the event in a letter addressed to the President of the Bank, which was read out during their speeches in the final panel.

A strongly-worded letter was used by the delegates to express their disagreement with the organization of the event and the conclusions reached during discussions. Reading from a letter prepared by the group, Hector Huertas Gonzalez (a Kuna from Panama) communicated the group's disappointment at the absence of a significant number of NGOs and community delegates. They felt the conference had not been able to reach an

understanding of the impact of mining at the local level.

To be more precise, they stated in the letter that out of the 40 delegates to the World Bank Conference there was just one Indigenous person, and he was from Canada and reflected in his speech experiences far removed from those of Latin Americans. In addition, representatives from Latin America had been unable to attend the workshop "Processes used during consultation" on the 7th of May due to the absence of a Spanish-English translator. This unfortunate example of how little the organizers had thought about the needs of delegates from the region happened not just once. On two more occasions and due to the same problem, Spanish-speaking delegates were left without any option but to abandon the discussions. As a result, they expressed doubts about the value of the consultation process instigated by the Bank, concluding that their participation was merely token. This is in marked contrast to a promise of "meaningful" participation made by the Bank in a letter addressed to the Latin America Project, dated April 18th.

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UPDATE:

During the debate many farmers and Indigenous people spoke about their wishes to "see" the real extent of environmental deterioration that open-pit mining has produced in Peru, by far one of the worst case presented during the conference.

As a follow up to this request The Latin America Mining Monitoring Program (LAMMP) and Accion Ecologica are presently organizing an international exchange trip between farmers and Indigenous people from Ecuador and Peru. It is the intention of the group to visit in Peru the communities of Cerro de Pasco, Oroya and the city of Ilo and to offer international support to these communities.