

## Bolivia, a mining country, hosting Women and Mining Conference in 2000

In January 1997, women from all over the world involved in mining met in Baguio City, Philippines for the First International Women and Mining Conference. Women, particularly Indigenous women, have long been uniquely affected by and involved in the mining that goes on in their countries. With the expansion of large scale mining and its inevitable dependence on the global market, women have been faced with changes to the organization of their societies, their economic systems, their interpersonal relationships, their natural environments as well as the health of themselves and their children. Despite their hardships and sacrifices, Indigenous women have often been invisible in the mining world.

In many countries local women's groups and community organizations formed to confront the reality of the effects of mining on their cultures and the environment and to come up with ways to reverse the negative effect that mining had on their lives at the individual, familial and community level. These organizations began to see more and more the need to interact with other like-minded organizations at a regional and international level. The NGO, Minewatch (England) was instrumental in forming an international network of women mine workers to coordinate with one another and share information.

Minewatch, together with the Women Workers Program, organized and hosted the First International Women and Mining Conference in the Philippines, the first of its kind. Representing their organizations, unions and Indigenous communities, women from Latin America, Africa, Asia, the Pacific and North America shared their experiences of multinational mining and discussed ways to resist its threats to their lives and communities. The delegates developed strategies for collaborating and supporting each other. Responding to the urgency of their needs, the delegates decided to organize regional events after the Conference and to strengthen their existing networks.

Plans are now under way for the Second International Women and Mining Conference to be hosted by CEPROMIN (Centro de Promocion Minera) in Bolivia in 2000. The organization hopes to bring 50 delegates representing all of the continents. The objectives of the Second International Conference are: to discover the shared and the particular situation and specific problems of the women in mining zones around the world, to facilitate the exchange of information concerning the impact of mining, and to denounce human rights violations, both territorial and culture, as well as the ecological disasters and health ramifications of mining activities. Other goals are to utilize the shared creativity of all those present to come up with tactics to improve the conditions of life in mining zones, and to establish links between organizations and between the countries to work on common issues and to negotiate before the pertinent organizations at the governmental and international levels.

The themes of the Second International Conference On Women and Mining will be those issues of central concern to the women and their organizations. These concerns relate to the changes at the global level in regard to mining exploitation, the informal and invisible work of women mineworkers (related to the global tendency to informalize and undervalue the contributions of women's work, following the model of domestic labor), the conditions of life, health and education, and the effects of the expansion of mining into new areas and its real impact on the ecosystem and the culture).

Bolivia, the site of the upcoming conference, is a country with a long history of mining. Its inhabitants have seen first hand the extraordinary impact of mining on the politics, environment and socio-economic dynamic of this country. The organizations in Bolivia have fought for decades for their survival, their rights and their dignity despite the massacres and militarization of their communities. CEPROMIN has extensive documentation of the severe health effects of mining on Indigenous women in Bolivia. Native women miners suffer respiratory illnesses, skin diseases, muscular afflictions and die young from the compounded polluting effects of life in the mines.

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