

<p>Ing. Víctor Hugo Ventura Ruiz Minister of Energy and Mines (MEM) of Guatemala</p>	<p>Julio Roberto Luna Aroche Director General of Mining, Ministry of Energy and Mines</p>
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April 14, 2025

Dear Minister and Director General:

We urge that your government respect the will of the Indigenous Q'eqchi' communities who are resisting the expansion of large-scale metallic mining in Izabal Department. On April 7, 54 mainly Q'eqchi' communities set up road blocks on the main highway leading from Rio Dulce north to the Peten with the message: "No to Mining!"

The harms caused by metallic mining are well-known to the communities of Panzos, Livingston, and El Estor in the Maya Q'eqchi' region of the Sierra Santa Cruz mountain range. For sixty years, they have been exposed to the pollution caused by the El Fénix nickel mine in El Estor: contaminating Lake Izabal and other local water sources, threatening fishers' source of income. Because of their outspoken opposition, residents have been unjustly criminalized and many the victims of land grabbing, arson, and repression. It was finally in December 2023 when the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled that the government of Guatemala is responsible for human rights violations (threats, assaults, killings) and ordered reparation measures. The following year, Hudbay Minerals Inc. (which owned the El Fénix mine from 2008 to 2011) resolved a decade-long lawsuit brought by victims' families in a court in Toronto, Canada. The victims were seeking justice for several abuses during that period, including the 2009 killing of Adolfo Ich Cháman, the 2009 shooting and paralysis of Germán Chub Choc, and the 2007 forced eviction of the Maya Q'eqchi' community of Lote Ocho, and the sexual abuse of eleven women by security personnel.

Communities now face more risks to their environment and human rights by yet another Canadian mining company. On January 28, authorities from Guatemala's Ministry of Energy and Mines (MEM) were called to a congressional hearing, at which it was disclosed that Rio Nickel, S.A. (a subsidiary of Canada-based Central America Nickel, or CAN) has more than a dozen mining exploration applications for nickel and other minerals, almost all of them located in the Sierra Santa Cruz region. The mobilization of opposition by more than 50 Maya Q'eqchi' communities was sparked by CAN's mining license application for the Santa Anita II mine in Livingston, Izabal. In meetings held between local residents and municipal authorities of Livingston and the of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN), Carlos Roberto Rodas Velásquez (MARN's departmental representative) indicated that the MARN has not received Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) studies from the Rio Nickel mining company.


We echo the demands of the Maya Q'eqchi' communities of the Sierra Santa Cruz and urge that your government:

- suspend all mining operations in the Santa Cruz region of El Estor, Panzos, Livingston
- form a commission to investigate harms against the Q'eqchi' people and the environment between 2004-2024 resulting from mining operations
- devise a plan for reparations
- implement a consultation process, based on prior and complete information in the Q'eqchi' language (as required by national and international law, the ILO Convention 169) to decide if mining operations continue into the future

Sincerely,



Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-coordinators



Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Carlos Alberto Avalos Ortiz, Vice-Minister of MEM for Mining and Hydrocarbons ~ via email
MARN: Ministerio de Ambiente y Recursos Naturales / Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources ~ via email
Lic. José Alejandro Córdoba, Ombudsman for Human Rights (PDH) ~ via email
Hugo Eduardo Beteta, Ambassador of Guatemala to the US ~ email, US mail
IACHR: Andrea Pochak (Rapporteur for Guatemala) and Arif Bulkan (Rights of Indigenous Peoples), Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email and US mail
OACNUDH: Mika Kanervavuori, Oficina del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos en Guatemala (UN) ~ via email
US State Department: Tobin John Bradley (US Ambassador to Guatemala) and Guatemala Desk Officers in Washington, DC ~ via email
US Senators Husted and Moreno and US Representatives Beatty, Brown, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Miller, Rulli, Sykes ~ via email

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