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Information and analysis  
bulletin on extractivism  
here and in Colombia

Project Accompaniment Solidarity Colombia  
May 2017

## Persecuted for Defending their Right to Have Access to Drinking Water

Since February 15, 2017, communities in the municipalities of Yopal and Aguazul, in the department of Casanare, peacefully gathered and blocked a road opposite the oil block project El Porton, run by the Canadian oil company Gran Tierra. Since the beginning of the mobilization, social leaders have received threatening calls, have been followed by different vehicles and three have been charged for obstructing the transit way.

Discovery of an oil well in Casanare in the '90s transformed the region into one of the most important for oil extraction. The consequences on Casanare's ecosystem were disastrous. For example, on March 2014, a drought, caused by seismic exploration and digging of oil wells resulted in the death of more than 25,000 capybaras and the extinction of the specie throughout the department. Water sources have been facing a 70% reduction in volume and some rivers have even disappeared.

Several communities are opposing the oil projects which have affected the local economy, eating away the social fabric and taking over the local indigenous population ancestral territories. In 2015, Daniel Abril, a well known local social leader, was assassinated by paramilitaries. He is not the only activist to have laid down his life for his beliefs in Casanare.

In 2009, an environmental licence to the Spanish oil company CEPOLSA, which to create 150 wells. In 2014, after facing opposition from the communities worried about their water sources, CEPOLSA

decided to step back. The following year, the Canadian Oil Company PAREX took over and received fierce opposition from the communities of La Union and the citizens of Yopal and Palmarito. For a second time, the project was abandoned.

In 2015, a study paid for by the community established that the region was inhabited by a rich biodiversity, and that its state of preservation could not sustain mining activities, of hydrocarbons nor of minerals.

Then, the Canadian oil company Gran Tierra came to the region. Helped by the National Agency for Environmental Licences (ANLA), the National Agency for Hydrocarbons and the Ministry of Interior, the company "consulted" the local population. The consultation was conducted in total disrespect and with an obvious lack of transparency. A farmer from La Union reported that they were asked to sign coupons for a snack. Unknown to the people was that by signing, they were also accepting the Prosperidad I well project. Furthermore, some signatures were bought to inhabitants who were in need of money or work.

To this day, the seismic exploration phase has been completed and the extraction phase has begun on some platforms. Other oil platforms to be built in the future are supposed to be installed only a few kilometres from the urban centres of Yopal and Aguazul. Yopal is the capital of Casanare. A few years ago, the aqueduct carrying drinking water to the town ran out due to natural causes, putting the urban centre in a precarious situation.

### *Yopal Is All of Us*

La Union and the communities affected by the oil project of the Company Gran Tierra are standing against the negative impacts of oil drilling in the region, impacts which are well known. Multiple reasons motivate the pacific road block, namely that: (1) the consultation was not done properly as there was obvious opposition to the project; (2) the wells are located only a few kilometres from the city of Yopal, which is not willing to compromise the suburbs of the departmental capital; (3) no serious environmental study has been conducted for the extraction phase; (4) presently, the community lives on agriculture, fish farming and cattle raising, an economy which would be ruined by oil drilling (5) at least 5 essential sources of drinking water and access to the phreatic layer have been discovered.

As a result of this precarious situation, the inhabitants of the communities at risk have gathered to peacefully block the road, since February 17, 2017. The measures previously taken have stopped the first drills, essential to the operations on the platforms, from arriving to the El Porton Block.



Representatives of different neighbourhoods have received threats. Individuals have been followed to their homes on motorcycles. Some have also found symbols on their house, which serve to identify military targets in the region, a gesture of intimidation. Many individuals have received calls telling them not to join the blockade for their own security and the safety of their families. The government supports Gran Tierra and states that the community is asking for trouble.

On March 5, 2017, three leaders were charged for obstruction of the transit way. Furthermore, on March 16th, the company accused the community of disregarding the right to work of their fellow workers. The fact that these incidents have been brought forth in court is an attempt to prevent the defence of the fundamental right to have access to drinking water.

A president of the junta de acción comunal involved with the association *Yopal, Somos Todos* said they were accused of expressing their discontent in the wrong way. However, she said that without these actions, the company would have already started the exploitation with disastrous consequences.

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## **Gender and the role of women in Colombia's peace process**

Women's experiences in Colombia have historically been marked by patterns of social and political exclusion, which impact on gender roles and relations. In shifting contexts of war and peace within a specific culture, gender attributes, roles, responsibilities, and identities shape, and in turn, are influenced by the norms for engagement in war and peace.

Women have played multiple, sometimes overlapping, roles related to war and peace in Colombia. Women have been peacemakers and peacebuilders, victims, change agents, and care providers. They have also been combatants and supporters of war, a status that is less publicized but clear when one notes the percentages of women assumed to participate in illegal armed groups in Colombia.

Males have been more likely to be kidnapped, tortured, arbitrarily detained, and forcibly recruited by the different armed actors. Women and girls, on the other hand, have been more likely to be subjected to massive displacement, sexual violence, rape, forced labour, forced prostitution, forced abortions, and enslavement. Moreover, as survivors, women often assume new roles.

Psychological impacts may thus vary by gender. As mothers and survivors, women are particularly vulnerable to the recruitment of their children by armed actors.

Displacement also has a disproportionate effect on women. Women and children constitute 78 per cent of Colombia's internally displaced population (IDP), and a disproportionate number of the IDP is Afro-Colombian or indigenous. Some 97 per cent of all IDP live under the poverty line without access to basic services including health, security, justice, and education. In their new locations, displaced women are exposed to further risk of sexual violence and are often targeted for exercising leadership in their communities.

Sexual and gender-based violence forms part of a continuum of violence and power that predates the armed conflict, and it both reflects and perpetuates structural inequalities. High levels of impunity discourage women from coming forward to denounce violence. Moreover, social taboos concerning sexual violence are fierce – silence tends to be the norm. Consequently, while the problem appears to be widespread and serious, it is difficult to measure and address the magnitude.

As for the LGBTI community, the legal recognition of their rights is relatively recent. In the context of the internal armed conflict, intolerance of diverse gender identities has commonly been life threatening. They are often subject to 'corrective violence' or 'social cleansing'.

In addition to its differential impact on women, men, and LGBTI persons, Colombia's armed conflict has had differing effects on girls, boys, and youths. In Colombia, young people fight on all sides of the war. Domestic

and intra-familial violence is one of the leading push factors that cause both girls and boys to leave home to join armed groups and gangs – and once within the conflict, it is often difficult for minors to get out. Moreover, Colombian children suffer directly when their parents or relatives are killed or threatened, or when their families and communities are displaced. There is an urgent need to do psychosocial work and undertake peace pedagogies with young people in order to break generational patterns of hatred and vengeance.



It is clear that peace can bring about a rapid reassessment of gender roles – and thus societal change. This reassessment is not always positive, however. Male combatants may return from war to feel their gender identity under threat, and stigmatization of ex-combatants is strong.

Truth commissions have long been considered a necessary component of transitional justice. Within this context, women have urged the parties to acknowledge the particular effects on women; to clarify the causes, origins and impacts of the conflict on women's lives; and to recognize who is responsible.

Women have, and continue to play an important role in sustaining the Colombian peace process. Working in every sector, women are creating a culture of peace and dialogue. Through this, the Colombian case shows finally that strong, independent, civil society organizations—especially women's organizations—have the capacity to prepare the way for a peace process and to influence its shape –both from within and from the outside.

Women's engagement and leadership can seal a peace deal and will help ensure its viability for the long haul.

### International accompaniers in Colombia

The PASC has been promoting an anti-imperialistic vision of international solidarity for 13 years now. Accompaniment serves as a means of protection for community and organizations, and creates a space for creating links of solidarity between here and Colombia.

If you're interested by accompaniment in Colombia, contact us or visit our website.

# Big Win for Colombian Community Against Canadian Mining Giant

The Indigenous and Afro-Colombian community of Marmato won a major court victory in their 10-year fight against a massive Canadian gold mine.

In February, Colombia's Constitutional Court ruled in favor of the residents of Marmato, a small Indigenous and Afro-Colombian community in the center of the country, in their 10-year fight against a massive open pit mine project by Canadian gold giant Gran Colombia Gold Corporation.

The court ruled that Colombia's Interior Ministry must first complete community consultations before the Canadian company can proceed with the project, which would require the demolition and relocation of the community.

The court also recognized the land rights of the Indigenous Cartama and Afro-Colombian Asojumar communities, as well as their traditional small-scale mining practices, which had been protected under Colombian law since 1946.

Judge Luis Ernesto Vargas Silva ruled that because 80 percent of the local population depends on subsistence mining activities, and because the project would require the displacement of the entire

community, the initial 2007 concession granted to the Canadian mining company had to be reviewed.

Since 2007, the community has fought the project both in the courts and on the land.

In 2011, Father Jose Reinel Restrepo, the local parish priest, was murdered after returning from the capital Bogota after registering the Church's objection to the project.

Gran Colombia launched a US\$700 million lawsuit against the Colombian government and local officials, accusing them of violating the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement by not proceeding with the relocation of the community.

"The church declares itself in defense of the poor, and the small scale miners of Marmato are at real risk of losing their jobs in this situation," Restrepo said in a video statement made four days before his murder. "The company doesn't provide them with an alternative to their jobs because the company wants to use open-pit mining, displacing the population and exploiting this area in a short period of time."

"They will have to kill me with bullets or machetes to get me out of there," he concluded.

*See our website for more information and complete articles.*

*Piedra*, it is the rock of resistance, the rock which, placed in the powerful's shoe, bothers. It is the one that, in all its diversity, constitutes our habitat, vital to our existence. It is the rock we throw. And, of course, it is the exploited rock. Extractivism, an economic model based on the exploitation of resources, ravages always increasingly here and elsewhere. It is in "Canada", on colonized lands, that the majority of mining companies hold their headquarters. As so, the Canadian companies deploy their activities in Colombia in all impunity, and take advantage and participate in the political and social violence that hits this country living in war.

The Project Accompaniment Solidarity Colombia is a collective which realizes accompaniment with Colombian communities and organizations since 2003, while also creating links here and in Colombia of groups and individuals struggling against the imposition of mega-projects of resource extraction.