
Mexico: Mining causes ecocide in Coahuayana, Michoacan

The Italo-Argentine mining company TERNIUM is planning to mine for iron minerals in nearly 2,000 hectares of tropical forest in the Municipality of Coahuayana in the State of Michoacán (south-western Mexico). Among other negative impacts, this activity will leave the whole Municipality (15 thousand inhabitants) without water. The El Saucito River has already felt the consequences as have the mountains and forest, and the villages of Santa Maria Miramar, El Saucito, La Palmita, El Parotal and Achotan are already suffering from the effects and have asked the authorities to declare a Municipal Ecological Conservation Zone.

The communities have denounced that “the company entered the territory to destroy our source of life – the mountains, the forest and the river El Saucito. Trees that were over one hundred years old, cedars, rosamoradas, mojos, ceibas and many other species have been felled.” “With the felling they have caused landslides with thousands of tons of silt and stones ending up in the river, in addition to the oil they use for their machinery.” In their letter of complaint to the authorities, the communities consider this damage as “ecocide.”

In ecological terms the company has already caused serious damage to the Municipality of Coahuayana in the process of collecting, storing and releasing the rainwater that supports life in this zone. For this reason the population is opposing any activity at the La Colomera mine by TERNIUM as they have observed over the past months how mining works have accelerated pollution of the El Saucito River and the forest and all the living beings that inhabit it. According to them “they are part of our very selves as communities. This company is a stranger in this land and doesn’t care if it destroys the forest and the river.” The communities’ greatest concern is that “in ten years time we will have become practically lifeless villages.”

The ecosystem the local population is defending is an area of incalculable ecological value as it is a natural transition system between the tropical forest ecosystem and the pine and oak forests and acts as a regulating mechanism for the water cycle. Furthermore, it is known that these forests contribute to balancing global climatic phenomena such as the greenhouse effect and global warming by trapping and storing carbon dioxide. This is very significant considering that this vegetation grows very fast thanks to the tropical climate.

The forest is also the ultimate refuge for endangered fauna, which is already feeling the effects of this ecocide: river otters (*Lontra longicaudis*), long-clawed freshwater prawns (*Macrobrachium* spp), parrots (*Amazona finschi* y *oratrix*), white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), and the ocellated turkey (*Meleagris ocellata*) – which in fact was considered to be extinct but is still to be found in the area – are examples of this.

At the beginning of 2008, the TERNIUM mining company has entered the territory of the Municipality of Coahuayana with the intention of working the iron mine in the vicinity of El Saucito and Cerro de la Aguja. The authorities did not react to defend the interests of the communities although the company never notified the Municipality of the works nor did it have any kind of permit. For this reason, the affected parties lodged various complaints and insisted on getting an answer. Thus on 29 October

representatives of the Federal Environmental Protection Prosecutor (Procuraduría Federal de Protección al Ambiente - PROFEPA) and from the mining company visited the area to check on the damage caused to the forest and river. However the inspection took place at night and only accompanied by representatives of the company, preventing participation by the communities that had made the complaints. The argument was that according to their regulations, there is no obligation to invite the complaining party, but only the accused party. That same day the regional representative of the Environmental Secretariat (SEMARNAT) stated that the "SEMARNAT agency in Michoacán has no record of any mining site in this Municipality, therefore there can be no type of permit to carry out work in this respect." However, on the contrary PROFEPA affirms that the company does have a permit, which the communities find suspicious.

For this reason, the inhabitants are making two appeals: first that the Northeast area of the municipal territory of Coahuayana ranging from the El Saucito river to the Cerro de la Aguja be declared a Municipal Conservation Zone, so that never again may any company or person feel they have the right to come and destroy the natural resources to be found in this forest and river. And secondly, that the concession to TERNIUM in the Municipality of Coahuayana must be cancelled.

Finally, the inhabitants state that:

"we do not want to negotiate, we do not want the money or the jobs promised by the company because there is no money nor any job that can pay for the life that is being destroyed there. We only want our right to clean water respected and our dignity and that of the forest respected."

In spite of the company's attempts to create social division and confrontation through false accusations against those resisting the mining works, the communities pointed out that resistance has been peaceful at all times and explained the following:

"We do not oppose the development of our Municipality, provided that this development is not a threat to our environment and to basic natural resources, such as water."

It is encouraging that little by little, the authorities are beginning to realize that the movement is advancing beyond their own expectations.

Signed by:

The inhabitants of the communities of El Parotal, La Palmita, Achotán, Santa Maria Miramar and El Saucito, members of the peaceful civil resistance movement against the La Colomera mine belonging to the TERNIUM company in the Municipality of Coahuayana

On this thirteenth day of the month of November of the year 2008

NO TO THE MINE, YES TO LIFE!!!

Note: In order to support these communities, you are invited to sign a letter of protest addressed to the local and national Mexican authorities, by entering www.salvalaselva.org Here you will find an action of protest by e-mail: NO to the death mining in Coahuayana, Michoacán, Mexico.

