
Costa Rica: The people say Yes to Life, No to Mining

The inhabitants of the northern zone of Costa Rica, gathered together in the Northern Front for Opposition to Mining (Frente Norte de Oposición a la Minería) are opposed to the Crucitas Mining project for open-cast gold mining and have organised a march in San Carlos, under the slogan of "Yes to life, No to Mining." They demand the suspension of mining projects and promotion of a sustainable, eco-touristic and agro-industrial development for the frontier communities that so far have been neglected.

The Crucitas Mining Project has its background in the initial request for an exploration permit submitted on 30 August, 1991 by Maurice Eugene Coates, a Canadian geologist, representing the Vientos de Abangares S.A. company. In 1995, it was certified that the entire stock of this company belonged to the Placer Dome society of Costa Rica, whose chairman at the time was William Earl Threlked, an American geologist, and the treasurer was Robert Pease, a geologist of Canadian origin. In turn, the entire stock of Placer Dome Costa Rica, S.A. belonged to Placer Dome Latin America Ltd, with William Earl Threlked (U.S. national) and Robert Bruce Pease (Canadian national) holding power of attorney. In 1998, Placer Dome Latin America launched a process for the sale of its project in Costa Rica, through the sale of Placer Dome, Costa Rica shares. This operation was concluded in 1999 in favour of the Canadian company Lyon Lake Mines Ltd. that changed its firm's name to Industrias Infinito Sociedad Anónoma (IISA).

On 13 March, IISA submitted the Environmental Impact Assessment for this Crucitas Mining Project to the National Environmental Technical Secretariat (SETENA). The fact that this study was submitted to SETENA --in the framework of communal and national opposition and the opposition of the two candidates presently contending the presidency of the country-- was understood as a manoeuvre to advance the process as much as possible, as the company is aware that opposition is total and that the project is only supported by the present government. As proof of this, it is to be noted that the Ministry of Environment and Energy (MINAE) granted the exploitation concession on 17 December 2001, through Resolution # R-578-2001-MINAE, in a completely undercover manner.

The mining rights in the area --covering 305.9 hectares-- are valid for a period of 10 years as from 16 January 2002 and the technology used will be open-cast mining with cyanide leaching, presently prohibited in many parts of the world due to the wide-spread contamination it involves. Furthermore, the degradation that this activity will cause to the local environment --particularly due to the use of cyanide-- also requires the logging of a wide forest area.

Aware of the ecological and social damage that this activity will cause in the region, the community authorities have declared that "it is not possible to allow the destruction of our flora and fauna in exchange for a pittance that, at the end of the day, will be all that is left to our country."

In the framework of investment-benefit indexes, total opening up of the market, unrestricted sale of natural resources, privatisation and foreignisation of companies, there is little room left for environmental and social considerations. But the Costa Rican people who suffer from these policies, know that in defending their nature they are defending their lives. And they are doing just that.

