

**REPORT ON THE  
EUROPEAN TOUR BY  
INDIGENOUS WOMEN FROM  
ECUADOR, GUATEMALA AND PERU**

**ORGANISED BY LAMMP**

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## SUMMARY

It could be considered that the testimonies here discussed are nothing more than anecdotal information, but this is far from true. The rural and indigenous women from Ecuador, Guatemala and Peru who took part in the European tour organised by LAMMP in October brought emblematic cases illustrating the range of obstacles faced by courageous women whose activism is grounded in environmental values and stems from a simple urge to survive.

Their stories show the immense influence of the extractive industry and its capacity to shape the destiny of the region. The women's unsettling testimonies also emphasise that the expansion of the extractive industry in Latin America is happening at great speed and at the expense of rural and indigenous land.

At a general level, the women's stories show political and corporate practices that have plagued the region for decades: lack of consultation and criminalisation of anti-mining activism. These are coupled with denial that the extractive industry has any impact on the environment or that it is linked to human rights abuses. The conclusion is that when it is easy to intimidate communities neither governments nor corporations seem willing to engage and obtain a social licence. The impact of these corporate practices on the erosion of democratic values cannot be exaggerated: they underpin people's distrust of governments.

The range and severity of the violence against women who oppose mining is remarkable. This probably explains why the women's stories show that they are emotionally troubled and unable to deal with the human tragedy that they live within their families and in their communities.

For the women who participated, the European Tour had a significant impact on their lives and inspired them to continue their struggle "for the right to have rights". The expressions of support were particularly welcomed by the indigenous women from Guatemala. They could not avoid contrasting the poverty of their communities, deprived of basic services, with the high standards of life of Europe and the wealth they saw in London and Brussels. Above all, many reported in admiration how good it felt to meet and talk at great length to members of foreign governments, MPs and MEPs. A meeting with a member of their government or a representative of a political party is something that in their countries is virtually impossible to obtain.

On behalf of all the delegates, LAMMP would like to express our gratitude to all the people, organisations and funders who with their help and support made the tour such an outstanding success.



**Case 1: Mining in Ecuador**  
**Lina Solano's testimony on behalf of the group "Women Defenders of Mother Earth"**

**I. Background**

Ecuador has a long tradition as a producer of bananas, coffee, cocoa, rice, potatoes and other products. Agriculture covers about 11% of the country and employs approximately one quarter of the labour force. Agriculture and livestock are the main economic activities for rural and indigenous groups, which make up about 25% of the population.

There is no history of large-scale mining, but in the past few years some mining companies - mostly Canadian – have begun prospecting for gold, and important discoveries have been made. Opposition from local communities arose, in particular from rural farmers and indigenous communities who became concerned with the impact of mining on reservoirs and rivers. Conflict intensified, and several farmers were formally accused of crimes against the state.

In 2008 after the country embarked on the formulation of a new constitution, all mining activity was stopped until a new mining law was passed. There was great public expectation; in particular because charges against those who opposed mining were dropped and promises were made that the new law would not be approved without community consultation.

**II. Opposition to mining is based on:**

On 29<sup>th</sup> January 2009 the new mining law was approved without community consultation. It gives mining the status of public interest, and as such access to land and water has been guaranteed. This special status goes against several articles of the national constitution including Arts. 15, 28, 50, 100 and 103 which give indigenous people rights to their ancestral land, recognition and respect for their culture, language, and traditional customs.

Lina provided ample evidence of how the Ecuadorian government and mining companies had failed to enforce the principle of prior information and the "community consultation" enshrined in both the new national constitution and the new mining law. She gave examples of how the government is selectively enforcing its own legislation. For example, in 2008 the Oil and Mining ministry revoked several mining concessions on the grounds that the companies had not carried out environmental impact assessments nor made any investment on their properties (Art 1). However, the ministry has not made any reference nor given any reasons as to why companies that had not carried out community consultations (as explicitly requested by Art 1 of the new mining law) had not had their contract revoked. Had the government enforced the principle of community consultation, companies such as Kinross-Aurelian, Corriente Resources, IAMGOLD and International Mining Corporation (IMC), which her group opposes on environmental grounds, would not be operating there today.

Despite article 3 of the mining law establishing that mining cannot be authorised in protected areas, approximately 615 has. of the buffer zone of the "Cajas" National Park (RAMSAR 2002) and 79 has. within the park have been affected by the concession given to IMC. The company IAMGOLD has been authorised to start operations within the protected forests of "Iquis-Yanunca".

**III Lina's personal testimony**

Lina is coordinator of the group "Women Defenders of Mother Earth", which operates in several provinces but has its base in Cuenca. Case documentation gathered by the group suggests that they have been at the centre of the police repression.

Lina has received threats and intimidation from unknown individuals and one person regularly sends information to her suggesting that she is under surveillance. The President of Ecuador has also verbally attacked and ridiculed her work.

The organisation FrontLine issued an appeal (<http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/node/1626>) on Lina's behalf. The government brought two charges against her, and she has attended hearings. She is accused of participating in a protest during 2007. Using information provided by a mining company, the government alleges that protesters (including Lina) attempted to break into mining property. The other charge is for participating in a public protest on 28<sup>th</sup> August, which it is alleged caused damage to public property. Both cases lack evidence, but nevertheless they drag on and in doing so they block the activities of the group. Proceedings are at the information-gathering stage.

#### **IV. The impact of mining projects on women**

The group "Women Defenders of Mother Earth" has used a broad range of initiatives to draw attention to how mining activities undermine the ability of women farmers to provide for their families and reduce their access to basic services such as water, thus contributing to women's poverty and further economic exclusion. The group seeks to build the capacity of women to participate in all aspects of development and to create interest and knowledge of such a complex activity as mining. They often say that their struggle to protect the environment is self-interest and the need to secure a future for their children.

##### **1) Criminalisation of women's activism**

Art 63 of the new mining law prevents people from opposing mining activities, which puts communities in the situation that they cannot challenge irresponsible mining practices. Lina provided the testimonies of several women from her group who face multiple lawsuits as a result of participating in public protests. The question is: what can the Ombudsman (Defensoria del Pueblo) do to protect ordinary citizens from state and corporate abuses?

Lina provided examples of a range of threats and intimidation suffered by women members of her group. For example, despite earning no more than US\$3 per day, there are two women who, as a result of participating in protests, face lawsuits in which the prosecutor has requested they be imprisoned for as long as the legal process takes. The women's choices are: prison or pay bail of up to US\$1,000.

In addition to phone and e-mail threatening texts and legal persecution, pro-mining groups have beaten others up, whilst a high number of the trustees face lawsuits. Given this situation, Lina has asked the Ombudsman for protective measures for the group, but so far nothing has happened.

##### **2) Violence against women activists**

Lina provided examples of how verbal abuse directed at women is gender-specific. They are labelled "prostitutes, old bitches, women scum", to name a few. Their rights to participate are challenged. Mining conflict at the community level has made them more vulnerable to violence, and their neighbours and pro-mining groups have beaten up several women.

Lina urged policy makers to support her group's requests that communities' right for consultation should be respected and enforced, as well as the right to challenge irresponsible practices and state abuse. She also requested protection for her group and support for ULAM (a regional network of women affected by mining). For Lina, women involved in anti-mining activism need to develop their own organisation, learn from each other and develop collective actions.

In a ground-breaking document to the Ombudsman, Lina Solano invokes Art. 215 of the constitution to request that the Ombudsman office protect people from state abuse and facilitate access to justice. The document provides evidence of both human rights abuses against women activists' members of "Defenders of Mother Earth" and examples of how government and corporations are failing to protect the environment. For the "Women Defenders of Mother Earth" it is important to have a response to all the issues raised in their document to the Ombudsman. She asked people and policy makers to write to the Ombudsman and request an answer to the document, which despite having been delivered in person by trustees of the group almost a year ago is still awaiting a response.

**Case 2: Mining in San Juan Sacatepequez (Guatemala)**  
**Maria Sian's testimony on behalf of the group "Flowers in Resistance"**

**I. Background**

On December 2007 the local authority provided the company Cementos Progreso with the necessary licence to start a quarry in their property "San Gabriel", located right in the middle of the indigenous communities of Loma Alta, Santa Fe, Ocaña, Pilar I, Pilar II, Cruz Blanca, Cruz Ayapán, Lo de Ramos, Las Trojes I, Las Trojes II and Los Pajoques, all part of the province of San Juan de Sacatepequez - a region in Guatemala inhabited by indigenous Mayan Kaqchikel, who are organised into cooperatives and micro-companies dedicated to planting flowers and growing a great variety of vegetables and fruit which are consumed in the capital city .

On May 31<sup>st</sup> farmers organised a pacific protest and requested that the local authority revoke the license to Cementos Progreso given that a community consultation which had taken place between 2006 and 2007 among 25 communities had rejected the mining project by an overwhelming majority of 333,634 against with only 183 in favour. Although the communities have ancestral rights to the land and the constitution requires their prior and informed consent as owners of the land, the government is of the opinion that according to ILO 169 communities have no power to veto projects

**II. Opposition to the project is based on:**

- (1) Inhabitants of the communities Las Trojes I y Las Trojes II would be displaced
- (2) Air contamination and dust affects farming and health of people, their animals and their crops
- (3) The quarry estimates that it would need 900,000 litres of water per day, which in turn would reduce water available for farming. (It is estimated that all communities consume 900,000 litres per month)
- (4) The area is known for having desert characteristics, and logging would impact on water reservoirs, thus making the area prone to droughts
- (5) Community areas currently used for farming would be converted into roads, which the company needs for transporting goods. With the roads, heavy traffic through the communities will increase.
- (6) Between 2006 and 2008 central government has given 5 adjacent areas to 3 mining companies (Entre Mares de Guatemala, Guatemala Copper and Montana Exploradora), which suggests that once mining start indigenous communities would have no choice but to move elsewhere.

**III. Maria Sian's personal testimony**

The communities feel powerless and have no trust in a state that does not listen to their voices of concern and denies them access to justice. Maria's message was "the communities strongly feel that mining destroys nature. We are not rich but we want the government to respect us and show us the same respect they bestow on powerful companies".

Examples of what she has lived as a result of opposing the mining projects:

- A para-military group known as "The Squadron" publicly supports Cementos Progreso. Maria reported that during raids, members of the group steal food and goods from women's homes and subject them to sexual abuse.
- Following protests that prevented Cementos Progreso lorries and personnel from travelling through the communities, in July 2008 the government used special powers to impose a curfew on the population, which lasted for months. The measure prevented people from having private meetings, which were interpreted as effectively becoming prisoners within their own homes. During the curfew, hundred of soldiers and police officers took control of the communities, and intimidation and human rights abuses against women become widespread. Women have been raped and beaten up for failing to disclose the whereabouts of family members. A woman who was raped went into labour and lost her baby.

- Seeking to silence opposition to the mining project, 40 people were detained during raids. At great personal cost the communities paid bail for them, but the legal process against them continues and they face charges for (allegedly) attempting against the security of the state, incitement to public disobedience and participating in illegal protest. Maria who has publicly voiced her opposition to the mining project fears for her family and her own security
- Following the public consultation more than 70 people have been taken into prison and at least 20 people have died. These incidents have not been investigated, but have been labelled “common violence”

#### **IV. The impact of mining projects on women**

##### **1. What is going to happen to us?**

Maria spoke critically of the fanfare of international agreements and publicity that on the one hand grants indigenous people the right to be consulted whilst in practice making them powerless to stop projects that go against their traditional life-styles. Women who live around mining developments are not able to “cover basic needs let alone lead a happy and fulfilled life”. The mine is “never far away from you. In the evening when the workers go home a cloud of red dust settles in my village, covering everything. Flowers and vegetable crops don’t grow, children are constantly ill and we women are just exhausted with worries because if we are not able to farm - how are we going to feed our children?”

Maria repeatedly asked policy makers to (a) understand the severe consequences of global mining projects on indigenous people. “We are simple and we are poor, but we are people and we want to live” (b) lobby the Guatemalan government not to give mining concessions within indigenous land. “Logging and mining destroy the soil. In a community of 50,000 people the company employs 250 men. This is not development. This is work for some and misery for the majority”.

##### **2. How can we women protect ourselves from abuse?**

Visibly racked with pain, Maria spoke of the way women are treated by soldiers and police officers during raids. “We are trophies to be taken. When soldiers search your house they sexually abuse women and they take with them the few possessions we have at home”. These experiences take “dignity away from women”, and many suffer from depression and show signs of a troubled state of mental health. “Some cry as soon as they start talking about what they have seen or what happened to them”. Fear of stigma stops them from disclosing or reporting these incidents to the authorities.

During protests women are an easy target for miners’ groups. She recalled one incident in which people travelling to a protest were lined up; women were separated and sprayed with petrol. The fact that attacks against women are not investigated and fear from further abuse prevents women from taking part in anti-mining activities.

She also said that women whose partners work for the mine obtain few benefits. “Men use the money for drinks, and when a woman protests she is beaten up”. Fear of being beaten by members of their family working for the company prevents women from voicing their opposition to the mine.

Maria said that violence against women is never discussed and governments or corporations refuse to see its link to mining projects. In her view, only recently and as a result of joining ULAM (a regional network of rural and indigenous women affected by mining) have women in her community began to talk about these issues as a way of breaking down barriers and challenging the stereotype that mining does not affect women. Maria acknowledged that this was a first step towards making companies responsible for abuses against women, and urged European governments and investors not to support mining corporations that had no respect for human rights. She also requested support for ULAM. “We want to help women deal with the impact of mining, as well as physical and sexual abuse”. ULAM in Guatemala puts women affected by mining in touch with others, thus helping them to overcome isolation.

**Case 3: Mining in Guatemala**  
**Carmen Mejia's testimony on behalf of Crisanta Perez Bamaca**

**I. Background**

Carmen Mejia participated in the European Tour in representation of her friend and neighbour Crisanta Gregoria Perez Bamaca, who decided against taking part in the tour for fear of being detained at the airport.

Both Carmen and Crisanta are indigenous Mayan Mam women who live in Agel, San Miguel de Ixtahuacan, Department of San Marcos, a community which is seriously affected by the gold mining carried out at the Marlin mine by the company Montana. Guatemalan-registered Montana S.A. is 100% owned by the Canadian mining corporation Goldcorp. The mine is very important to the Guatemalan government because it is the biggest tax contributor in the country.

Carmen said that Crisanta Perez Bamaca (39 years old) left her home in July 2009 and has not returned despite leaving her six children behind. Crisanta had to leave because she was being persecuted, constantly threatened, with her house under surveillance and the police actively seeking her.

**II. Opposition to mining is based on:**

**Lack of consultation.**

Ever since it began its activities in 2000, Montana's mine has caused much conflict with the indigenous population, who allege that they were neither informed nor consulted by the government, as established by the ILO 169 agreement. The World Bank through CAO (the Ombudsman's complaints office) confirmed this lack of consultation.

**Destruction of private property**

The community believes that constant explosions at the mine are responsible for producing many severe cracks in houses. There are about 150 families whose houses are affected, making them unstable.

**Water contamination**

When river pollution became obvious and wells dried up, families living close to the mine began to express their concerns about the impact on their health and livelihood.

**III. Carmen's testimony**

Carmen said that her friend and neighbour began public opposition against the mine when several huge pylons – part of a high-voltage power line - were built across the rear of Crisanta's house. The power line is very important for the company because it supplies all the electricity to the mine.

In spite of her worries, Crisanta did not start to actively express her concerns for the health of her children until much later. She became very concerned about the intense noise generated by the power line, which she argued was affecting her children, who constantly complained of headaches. In spite of informing the mine of her worries about her family's health and of the fact that one of the pillars appeared to be loose (which worried her because it was going to fall on her house), the mine operators ignored her complaints. She followed normal channels and requested her local authority's support to put pressure on Montana. Crisanta felt that as the company was responsible for the problems caused to her property and her family, the company should solve them.

When the local authority ignored her demands Crisanta became desperate and did not know what to do to resolve the problems. On 16th May 2008 she cut off the electricity, simply by short-circuiting the cables. On this occasion she denied access to her property by the mine personnel and repeated her worries about the impact of the power line on her children. Without her authorisation they carried out repairs and restarted the electricity to the mine. One month later, in frustration at her complaints being ignored, on 11<sup>th</sup> June she again cut off the electricity to the mine.

A little after this second attempt to stop the power line, senior mine officials appeared at her house in order to repair the line. This time Crisanta categorically refused access to her land, stating that it was private property and that the mine employees were not welcome. A group of women from the village gathered in her defence, expressing their solidarity.

On 13th June 2008 the General Manager and the legal representative of Montana, Milton Eduardo Saravia Rodriguez, started a legal process (number 166-2008-1964 Agente I) against Crisanta, her uncle Fernando Perez Bemaca and the seven women who had demonstrated their support with their presence and their loud voices in protest.

On 17<sup>th</sup> June 2008 the District Magistrate Selvin Boris Mendez accused Crisanta of aggravated misappropriation, incitement to crime, attempting against the security of public utility services and disobedience. In the light of these alleged crimes, he requested an order for her capture "because of the social, economic and judicial impact of the criminal behaviour". He also ordered that the state "initiate an urgent investigation to avoid greater losses to the company and to set a precedent that the state upholds the law".

#### **IV. The impact of mining projects on women**

##### **1. Persecution and criminalisation of indigenous women that challenge irresponsible mining practices:**

Carmen argued that Crisanta's voice of peaceful protest, as well as that of all the women from the village who support her, have been ignored both by the state and by the corporation. In her mind, Carmen has no doubt that the charges against Crisanta are the result of her work as one of the first women standing up in defence of her rights.

The idea that the company is keen to silence Crisanta can be seen in the way her work is penalised. For example, on 20th June 2008 Judge Blanca Elizabeth Gonzalez Galvez in San Marcos issued a resolution which argued that "... the imprisonment of Mrs Perez Bamaca and her neighbours for the crime of aggravated misappropriation ..." was necessary. There was no mention of Crisanta's failed attempts to get the company to act on her concerns. On 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2008 the judge ordered the police to detain Mrs Perez Bamaca and her neighbours Crisanta Hernandez Perez, Patrocinia Mateo Mejia, Catalina Perez Hernandez, Olga Bemaca Gonzalez, Maria Diaz, Crisanta Yoc and Marta Perez.

Given this situation, Carmen feels the state and the corporation are against Crisanta; and this is the reason why Crisanta refuses to turn herself in. Crisanta is convinced that as the authorities have not shown any interest in a fair and independent trial, she will be charged and sent to prison.

As a result of her work, Crisanta is being recognised as a community leader, and her struggle has transformed her into a woman with a high profile. Other communities are coming in her support. Given that there are other people mentioned in the arrest warrant but Crisanta is the only one who is watched and followed, everybody believes that this is an indication that she has been singled out by powerful interests who want to make an example of her defiance. With the argument that the defence work of Mrs Perez Bamaca incites crime and civil disobedience, her imprisonment seeks to silence and intimidate other women - members of the community - who have joined her struggle. For Carmen it is important that all the applications for protection introduced by Crisanta's lawyers have been refused, with no explanation other than that "her imprisonment is necessary".

A second lawsuit against Crisanta is an example of how the company is unable to manage community relations and how Crisanta's high profile as a leader backfires on her. Families in the village became very concerned when company workers began working close to a spring. Concerned by a water shortage, the company was told to remove its equipment and to stop digging. Despite agreeing to do so, the company did not remove the equipment and some angry people destroyed it.

Montana has identified several members of the community including Crisanta as responsible for the destruction of its property. She alleges that she did not take part in this incident, that all she did was to

speak at one community event about the suffering the company will bring to the community in the event of the spring (one of the very few remaining) becoming contaminated. Crisanta's name appears in the new accusation as instrumental in this crime. She and several members of the community are accused of destroying Montana property, and their detention is ordered.

## **2. Consequences to the well-being of families**

Alone and with no resources, Crisanta's family and friends fear for her life. Her children are alone, left to the irregular care of some members of the community. Crisanta is responsible for farming, taking care of their animals and doing housework so there is great concern as to how long she can continue to live away from her home.

## **3. Lack of support**

Carmen raised awareness of the challenges and obstacles faced by indigenous women like Crisanta. Alone and without support, Crisanta was very vulnerable; and it has been an uphill struggle for her to get help. With the assistance of ULAM (a regional network which supports rural and indigenous women affected by mining), Crisanta is working to raise international awareness of her dramatic situation. Carmen requested ULAM's support because in Guatemala indigenous women - one of the most vulnerable and excluded groups in the country - suffer physical and sexual abuse in silence during protests and forced evictions.

Throughout her intervention, Carmen requested support for Crisanta so that:

1. An independent investigation takes place into the accusations against Crisanta (and women neighbours who supported her), given that the procedures have not been followed and there is clear evidence that they are trying to make an example of her
2. The detention order against her be revoked, because it criminalises her work and turns her into a common delinquent, when all her struggle in defence of the community's rights is fully identified in the national constitution as a right of the citizen
3. The right of the indigenous communities to participate and to oppose mining projects which affect their right to a safe environment and to health be recognised
4. Pressure be applied against Montana's abuse of power, because neither the government nor the corporation have taken into account that Crisanta alleges that she only signed a blank document where she (acting in good faith) authorised the high-tension cables to cross the rear of her house. Instead the company built huge, overpowering concrete bases, which dominate the landscape. These bases were later used without her consent to hold the high voltage cables. This authorisation was later notarised by Montana, but Crisanta was not present, nor did she sign before a public notary
5. The government and the corporation recognise that there are severe irregularities around the contract that the company alleges Crisanta signed and which gave the company the right to use her patio in perpetuity. For example, up until now the company has not produced this contract nor any other document showing the sum for which Crisanta gave the use of her back yard
6. The Guatemalan state recognise that Crisanta is only asking for justice and respect for her right to enjoy her life with dignity.



## **Case 4: Mining in Peru** **Elizabeth Cunya's testimony**

### **I. Background**

In the last decade the extractive industry has grown in importance in Peru, and today more than 6% of the country's domestic product comes from mining. Despite the recession, Peru - the most important gold producer in Latin America - continues to attract investment because it offers a combination of low cost gold producing mines (such as the Pierina mine) with rich deposits such as the Yanacocha Mine (the largest gold producer in the region).

### **II. Opposition to Mining is based on:**

#### **Loss of agricultural land**

Mining has grown at the expense of agricultural and indigenous land. Figures produced by the Peruvian NGO Cooperaccion conclude that the national area earmarked for mining went from 7.4 million hectares in 2002 to more than 17 million hectares in 2008.

Loss of land combined with rapid social and economic change have brought about profound changes among people whose lives are rooted in ancestral traditions. The Ministry of Energy and Mines estimates there are 850 mines, most of them located in rural/indigenous territories. Peru is a country where according to the Ombudsman (Defensoria del Pueblo), year after year conflict over mining is the first cause of complaint. The fact that indigenous people and small farmers occupy 55 percent of farmland in Peru is key to understanding the conflict.

#### **Lack of consultation**

In the department of Piura (where Elizabeth comes from), mining concessions cover 836,328 ha and the Rio Blanco copper project on the border with Ecuador covers an extension of 6,472 hectares. She opposes the Rio Blanco project, and identified the lack of consultation and dialogue as one of the most important problems faced by rural communities, followed by concern about the location of the mine in the headwaters of the River Rio Blanco right at the heart of the highlands of Piura, a region of great ecological importance home to rivers on which the rural population depend for their production of vegetables and fruits - mainly for export.

In an attempt to force a dialogue with the company and local authorities, a "Sacrifice March" was organised in August 2005. The term sacrifice came about because the difficult terrain required great endurance from those who took part in the seven-day journey to the top of the mountain where the "Henry Hill" mining camp was situated. Elizabeth estimated the number of people who took part in the march between 3,000 and 5,000.

### **III. Elizabeth's personal testimony**

Elizabeth described the march as a "family event": children, grandparents, young and old as well as their animals took part in the march. In her words, everything went well until the police helicopters began flying over the crowd. She said the army ambushed them, fired teargas at them and beat them. She was one of two women who together with 29 men were taken prisoner and taken to the mining camp where they were tortured. In a calm almost monotonous way, Elizabeth relived what happened to her during the three days that she was detained at the mining camp. "We were handcuffed, a black plastic bag put over our heads, stripped, beaten especially the soles of our feet and subjected to degrading sexual abuse." The first meal and water was given to them on the second day when the public prosecutor arrived together with a forensic doctor. The prosecutor - who felt that the protestors had not needed to take part in the protest - verbally abused them: "You brought this upon yourselves". Elizabeth is adamant that the prosecutor destroyed all evidence of the torture and the inhumane treatment they received at the hands of the police and the company's security force.

After being released, Elizabeth sought medical attention on several occasions. She has partially lost hearing in her left ear due to the blows to her head, and has been diagnosed with port-

traumatic stress. Since taking part in the protest she has regularly received threatening messages warning her that she is being watched. She lost her job partially as a result of the lawsuit that the Public Prosecutor brought against her and all the other people who were detained, as “the ring leaders” after being released. Terrorism and breaking into the mine’s property with intention to cause damage are among the charges she was accused of in 2005. The process continues to this day.

Elizabeth recalled that it was not until January 2009 - when photos of the torture were released - that for the first time the dramatic story of what happened made it to the front pages of national newspapers.

#### **IV. The impact of mining projects on women**

Elizabeth differentiates between activists like her and women victims of contamination and human rights abuse within communities affected by mining. She identified silence and impunity as two major problems affecting women who get involved in anti-mining activism. Most women activists suffer severe beatings by pro-miners or police repression in silence during protests, evictions etc because there is the widespread perception that the police are simply not interested in investigating complaints linked to mining protests. From her own experience she knows that the consequences of suffering in silence are devastating for a woman’s mental health.

Elizabeth acknowledges that given this situation ULAM (a regional network for women affected by mining to which belongs) represents an important, safe and secure space for women to discuss, share their experiences and support each other. Since joining ULAM for the first time she has been able to use her experience to bring together women, inspiring and motivating them to work together. “ I know women who face lawsuits and attend hearings on their own because there are no support network available for them. We women need to work together to overcome barriers that marginalise us”.

But given its high personal cost, community activism is not for everyone. She feels that ordinary women need to familiarise themselves with health risks associated with mining, especially as women are constantly using contaminated water. She cited for example the lorries carrying mercury which are involved in accidents, and although clean-ups take place any residues left in the soil make women vulnerable to genetic alterations, something which pregnant women at least should be aware of.

Elizabeth urged European investors and policy makers to consider the environmental impact of mining on the cloud forests of her native Piura. In her words, the impact of destroying them will be felt world-wide. She also spoke of the need to respect communities’ rights to challenge projects, which threaten their livelihoods. The criminalisation of participation in protests is widespread in Peru. She requested from UK and European members of parliament she met that pressure be put on the Peruvian government to drop charges against the 31 people who were tortured at the mining camp. “Without support, through the legal process we have been victimised again and again.”

