



Women and Mining in Peru

As farmers, consumers and care-givers, rural and indigenous women bear most of the visible and invisible environmental and social consequences of mineral extraction. Yet those who dare to speak out do so at great personal risk. The following testimonies of three women from around the country illustrate the deleterious effects of mining on their homes and traditional ways of living.

MARGARITA ANCHIRAICA
Margarita lives with her mother and two young sons in Glorieta de Mayoc, a village 80km east of Lima. Mining has been a feature of this Andean village since colonial times; and large-scale mining has brought business, jobs and environmental problems.

Through chronic exposure to mining dust and toxic tailings, members of the community have contracted arsenical dermatitis and many other dermatological diseases. Toxic particles present in the air have badly affected the children, and skin and respiratory problems are prevalent.

Margarita's adobe cottage and small farming plot are adjacent to one of the mine's tailings tip. To escape dust and noise, most of her neighbours sold their properties but Margarita stayed. "This is my mother's home and we have nowhere to go," she explains. Margarita has dedicated much of the past ten years to fighting the public health and environmental ramifications of the mine, but to little avail.

In 2003 Margarita and the Committee of People Affected

by the activities of the Tamboraque mine took their complaint to the Inter-American Human Rights Commission of the Organisation of American States, alleging violations to the right to life, health, property and freedom of assembly. The complaint was upheld.

In 2006 the Canadian Gold Hawk bought the Tamboraque mine and renamed it Caricancha. Production and processing of gold and silver followed a year later. Margarita says, "as soon as the new owners took over, the soft-spoken polite Canadian managers and workers began putting relentless pressure on me." They claimed that the OAS complaint affected their image and caused problems with the authorities. "They

wanted me to withdraw the complaint, and in exchange they promised work and handouts.”

Most members of the Committee gave in to the mine, and gradually Margarita became the only person refusing to accommodate the mining company. This act of defiance brought upon her the anger of mine workers and the community; to this day she suffers a constant barrage of humiliation and harassment. “Stones were thrown onto the roofs of our houses...one of the mine workers...came to my door to insult me and threaten to blow me up,” she reported. Her niece was threatened with rape, the main electricity cables were deliberately cut and an angry mob threatened to throw her into the river. Despite threats, attacks and intimidation the police have offered her only sporadic protection.

The whole village is divided between those who favour the mine and those like Margarita

who push for strict environmental standards. “My struggle to end the mining pollution of my hometown is the story of my life, but I am continually intimidated, verbally abused and receive death threats,” said Margarita.

In 2007, through its 100 percent subsidiary Compañía Minera San Juan, Gold Hawk constructed a large tailings pond to contain more than a ton of toxic waste left by the extraction process.

In May 2008 after ground displacements were detected in the tailing areas, the mine was closed. In July the government declared the area in a state of emergency due to landslide risks, which threatened the river Rimac, the main source of water for the entire city of Lima.

As a result of soil contamination Margarita is not able to farm any more. “Life is a struggle,” she says. Her cleaning job with the council provides her with less than



Margarita in her home in Mayoc

US\$3 a day. Her battle with the authorities is not over yet; the mine is still closed but new permits have been granted. The company is expected to restart operations in mid 2009.

Hilda Huaman

Hilda grew up in the city of Espinar, where she was a respected community leader and member of several groups challenging the operations of the Tintaya mine. The mine, which in the early 80s started as a state-run operation, has had many owners. However members of the rural communities directly affected by the mine operations maintain that the mine was constructed without due consultation and that new projects (to increase its capacity) as well as tailings ponds have been added without due consideration to the social and environmental impact.

Distrust of local mechanisms to resolve disputes is exacerbated by the fact that on those occasions when complaints of poor waste management and severe environmental degradation that affects livestock have been investigated, the mine has always been exonerated of any wrong-doing. Feelings that mining corporations are allowed to do as they please are entrenched, and leaders report a lack of transparency and access to information, especially during spills of toxic

Mining in Peru: Rapid Growth and Social Conflict

The decade 1990 to 2000 saw mining investment in Peru increase five-fold. Mining now comprises 6.6 % of GDP and makes up 57 percent of the country's exports. The staggering growth of the mining industry has earned Peru a place among world-class producers. A 2005 World Bank report puts Peru as the world's second largest producer of silver, third largest producer of zinc, and sixth largest producer of gold.

The United Kingdom has been one of the biggest investors in the growing mineral sector. In 2002 total investment in mineral exploration and production by UK companies totalled nearly US\$800 million, over 47 percent of total foreign investment in the mineral sector.

But steady expansion of the mining industry requires an ever-increasing supply of land. Concessions for mineral exploration quadrupled from four million to 16 million acres between 1990 and 2000, according to the World Bank. Mining is so ubiquitous that in 1999 over 50 percent of rural communities were affected by mining.

materials when they are prevented from taking photos.

In 2003 in her capacity as secretary for human rights of the “Front for the Defence of Espinar Rights”, Hilda participated in discussions with BHP Billiton, which culminated in an agreement known as the “Convenio Marco” which, among other points established that BHP Billiton would redistribute up to 3% of its pre-tax profits to development projects.

Leaders of grass-roots groups report that after the agreement was signed they suffered persecution. This situation, coupled with complaints that BHP Billiton was not fulfilling agreements, was the reason for them drafting a new agreement and demanding that BHP Billiton sign it within two days. The refusal of BHP Billiton managers to meet with the organisers resulted in three days of public protest. There were some incidents of violence and destruction of property.

Local police detained and charged 73 people with disproportionately large offences, alleging \$US10 million worth of damage and loss of revenue. The mine was closed for a month for fear of further vandalism.

Hilda feels victimised because although she was not among those who entered the offices of the company, she was singled out and accused of leading the protests, instigating criminal acts, violence towards authorities and obstructing their legal duties. “Is it a crime to participate in a public protest?” asks Hilda.

A criminal investigation was started against her and the 73 other protestors. Hilda reports that during hearings she “was asked to admit her responsibility given the evidence against her”.

The legal process dragged on for years. During this time Hilda reports that mine workers and representative of local authorities subjected her

to surveillance and death threats. The media constantly reported on her activities, and one TV channel referred to her as a terrorist. The process has left her physically and emotionally exhausted. “Sometimes I was notified about an oral hearing only the day before, which meant that I had to leave my work and travel for hours, only to find that the hearing had been cancelled due to minor problems”.

Despite an appeal by the state prosecutor, in January 2009 all 73-community activists were absolved of their crimes for lack of evidence. However, the social conflict over the activities of the mine continues. Unable to cope with threats and surveillance, Hilda has moved to another town.

Cleofe Neyra

Cleofe has been punished both for her activism and for being a woman.

She is from the Piura highlands, along Peru’s northern border with Ecuador. She enjoyed a simple life as a farmer in the community of Ñangalí, Huancabamba. In 2003 the arrival of UK-based mining company Monterrico Metals permanently changed Cleofe’s life.

Ñangalí is a *comunidad campesina* - a peasant community - protected by a law requiring a two-thirds majority of community members to consent to any externally imposed development project. From the start, the Majaz mine was controversial. The communities of Segunda y Cajas and Yanta alleged they were not consulted about the project. Furthermore, as the territory is situated



Isolation and Persecution of Women Activists

These testimonies demonstrate that, women mining activism requires courage and tremendous doses of commitment. “I am constantly the target of comments and jokes from the workers of the mine and their families. Some of them spit at me when they meet me in the street,” says Margarita.

Lack of support demoralises women and leaves them feeling persecuted, devalued, and marginalised. In response to this complex problem, in conjunction with women activists LAMMP has set up the Women Defenders Network (Unión Latinoamericana de Mujeres). Margarita, Hilda and Cleofe have set up women’s groups and are now part of a regional platform which brings women activists together and provides them with the tools and resources to build their organisational capacity, as well as a sense of support and solidarity. A key component of this work is documenting and monitoring human rights violations against women activists.

adjacent to Peru's border with Ecuador, the presidential decree 023-2003 granted permits on the grounds that the mine was of public necessity and special interest to the Peruvian state.



Cleofe (left) with Liliana Alzamora of the Union Latinoamericana de Mujeres

Amidst overwhelming opposition by the local communities Monterrico proceeded to build its campsite, signalling the start of its exploration activities.

In the summer of 2005, after requests for dialogue with Majaz were ignored, hundreds of campesinos organised a peaceful march to the mining site of Henry's Hill. Their objective was to force the workers out of their territory.

As a member of the traditional "Ronda Campesinas" (a group of leaders responsible for enforcing law and order within communities), Cleofe took part

in the five-day march. "It started well, but the police ambushed and attacked us with tear gas. They burnt our clothes and destroyed our food," says Cleofe, adding, "I was among the 28 who were caught and imprisoned in the campsite".

During five days of captivity Cleofe and another woman were kept half-naked in a small toilet with a plastic black sack over their heads, their feet and hands tied.

"We didn't have food or water. Repeatedly they beat us with their fists and boots. All of them took pleasure in squeezing my breasts so hard that often I felt like fainting". Cleofe acknowledges that she has not been able to recover physically or emotionally from her ordeal. It was not just the fear of the beating or the lack of water. "They constantly threatened us with rape", whilst indulging in fantasies of what they were going to do to us.

When Cleofe was released she lodged a complaint with the state prosecutor. The company denied any involvement, and so her complaint was not investigated. In retaliation the

company sued her, alleging that she broke into the mine site and destroyed private property.

Although still angry and unable to deal with the consequences of her experience, Cleofe admits she does "not know what else I could do. I am a poor, vulnerable woman. I am not the only woman punished for opposing a project, but I don't recall a case in which justice has been done". Whilst the legal process against her continues its way, in January 2009 photos were released that clearly illustrate the abuses and injuries inflicted by the police and security workers on the *campesinos* detained at the Majaz campsite. In response to the public outcry the government ordered an investigation. In the meantime Cleofe continues receiving threatening death messages advising her "not to talk".



About LAMMP

LAMMP is a small charity committed to improving the lives of Latin American women affected by mining. Our vision is a future where women's voices and presence influence corporate practice and mining policymaking. Our objectives are to empower rural and indigenous women in their efforts to ensure that mineral resources are exploited in a sustainable way, with a gender perspective and respecting human rights.

What You Can Do to Help

Cleofe, Margarita, and Hilda are just a few of the many women that LAMMP supports who are affected by mining.

- Write to your MP, MEP, the FCO or the UN. Tell them you don't support mining investment because of the human and environmental side effects and ask them to pressure corporations to operate responsibly.
- If you are a policymaker, support socially and environmentally responsible mining.
- Join LAMMP's mailing list and network of international supporters who are fighting against the injustice of mining. To join, contact us at info@lammp.org.uk.
- Financial support is always welcome but LAMMP also requires legal representation and advice, campaign assistance, and capacity-building resources. Do you have something to contribute? Please contact LAMMP by e-mail to info@lammp.org.uk for more information.