

National Roundtable Against Metallic Mining Speaking Tour

March 2013

Overview of mining in El Salvador:

The tiny country of El Salvador is caught up in a David vs. Goliath battle as it struggles to defend the human right to water and the public health of its citizens. Metallic mining projects would pose a significant threat to the already taxed water supplies of El Salvador, as well to the environment and public health in this densely populated country. The civil society organizations and affected communities that make up the National Roundtable against Metallic Mining (the *Mesa*) have been struggling to stop metallic mining in El Salvador since 2006. The *Mesa* represents hundreds of communities and thousands of people throughout the country and includes environmental, community-based, research, legal and religious organizations.

In 2007, when the Salvadoran government began to put restrictions on the mining industry, as a result of the efforts made by the *Mesa* and other members of civil society, two multinational mining corporations, Pacific Rim and Commerce Group, responded by filing lawsuits against the government. The companies claim that their rights as investors are being violated. Pacific Rim, a Vancouver based company looking to mine in the department of Cabañas, is claiming losses of up to \$100 million. On June 1st, 2012 a panel of three arbitrators hearing the case in a trade tribunal that is part of the World Bank ruled that the case would be allowed to continue.

The controversy over Pacific Rim's mining project in Cabañas has not come without a social cost. To date four environmentalists opposing mining from the region have been murdered, and countless others have suffered from threats, attacks, kidnapping attempts and violence. While the Attorney General's Office in El Salvador has never done thorough investigations into the intellectual authors of the crimes in Cabañas, local residents say that community divisions and conflict started when Pacific Rim arrived and began promoting their mining projects.

The *Mesa* is fighting back against Pacific Rim and other companies in El Salvador by educating the population around the dangers of mining, carrying out scientific research to support their positions, and pressuring decision makers in El Salvador to protect the environment and public health. For the *Mesa* the only way to protect El Salvador from the problems caused by metallic mining is complete ban on all metallic mining. As the debate around a mining ban continues in the Legislative Assembly, the communities and social movement continue to organize and struggle against this dangerous industry.

However, because almost of all of El Salvador's surface water comes from sources outside its borders, mining projects across the border in Guatemala and Honduras could also have dangerous results. Currently, a Gold Corp subsidiary is constructing a gold mine a scarce 14 km from the Guija Lake, the source of the main river in El Salvador. The *Mesa* is working to build international ties with groups resisting mining in Honduras and Guatemala in order to build a unified Central American resistance that protects all their shared watersheds.

Speaking Tour in Canada and the U.S,

In commemoration of World Water day on March 22, 2013 and order to raise awareness around the threats gold mining it poses to the right to water in El Salvador, organizations in the U.S. and Canada are organizing a speaking tour for Vidalina Morales, representative of the National Roundtable against Metallic Mining in El Salvador. The tour will cover from Vancouver to Halifax, and continue down the East Coast of the United States during the month of March.

The tour is being organized by the Committee to Support Social Development in El Salvador (CODESES), MiningWatch Canada, the Council of Canadians, the United Church of Canada, KIAROS: Canadian Ecumenical Initiatives, Canadians for Mining Awareness, The Natural Resource Council of Maine, Grassroots International, and the Institute for Policy Studies.

Bio for Speaker from El Salvador

Vidalina Morales de Gámez, is a member, The National Roundtable against Metallic Mining in El Salvador (the *Mesa*). Vidalina Morales is a mother of five children and has worked with ADES – Economic and Social Development Association of Santa Marta for over 10 years. She has worked directly on mining issues as an organizer in Cabañas communities since 2006. She has been invited to speak internationally about El Salvador's fights against mining a number of times over the years and in 2009 gave the acceptance speech for the *Mesa's* Letelier-Moffitt Human Rights Award.

"Instead of a law allowing Pacific Rim to sue our government, they should be sued," she says. "The company should be made to pay for all the damage they've caused to our environment and our community." -2010 Interview

"We reject the image of us just as anti-mining. We are for water and a positive future. We want alternatives to feed us, to clothe us" -2011 Interview



Vidalina speaks at a protest at Pacific Rim's headquarters in Vancouver

Updated Draft Schedule

March 11-Travel to Vancouver
March 12, 13, 14- Vancouver and Victoria presentations
March 15- Travel to Toronto via Niagara Falls
March 16-am Drive down to London
Pm Presentation
March 17- am drive London to Waterloo and Guelph
Pm- presentation
March 18-19 Toronto
March 20-Peterborough and Kingston
March 21-22-Ottawa
March 23-24-Montreal
March 25- morning flight to the Halifax
March 25, 26-Halifax
2nd Mesa speaker arrives from El Salvador

March 27-Sackville
March 28-Fredericton
March 29- am Fredericton
Pm- Northern Maine
March 30-Travel to Southern Maine
March 30-31-Easter Weekend rest in Maine
April 1- Portland or Augusta/ Maine Press
Vidalina flies from PWM to El Salvador
April 2-am travel to Boston,
pm Boston events
April 3- am Boston
Pm travel to NYC
April 4 -NYC
April 5- am travel to DC
April 5-9- Washington- Ecumenical Advocacy Days and other DC events
April 10- Return to El Salvador