

Government of Guatemala addresses popular complaint about mining project



By María Josefina Arce.

In recent days, the government of President Bernardo Arévalo made an important decision, which takes into account an old demand from the residents of the community of Asunción Mita, in the Guatemalan department of Jutiapa, regarding the questioned Cerro Blanco mining project.

The authorities annulled the environmental license for open-pit exploitation of the gold and silver deposit, which had been granted to the Canadian company Bluestone Resources by the previous administration, headed by then-president Alejandro Gianmattei.

Despite the rejection of environmental organizations and residents of the community of Asunción Mita, a few days after the end of his mandate in January of this year, the Gianmattei government approved the exploitation of Cerro Blanco with this questioned system.

In 2016, the Canadian company acquired the exploitation rights of the mine, but decided to change the underground method to the open pit method, highly controversial due to its negative consequences for the environment and the health of the populations in the area.

The damage caused by extractive activities through this mechanism is well known, causing contamination of air, soil, surface water and underground aquifers.

This procedure also produces alterations in the microclimate, affects local and regional flora and fauna, and damages the health of surrounding populations.

With the granting of the license, the Gianmattei government did not take these crucial aspects into account, but also ignored the claims of the community of Asunción Mita, which in September 2022 held a municipal consultation that rejected the mining activity, and which was invalidated. promptly in less than 24 hours by the Ministry of Energy and Mines.

The project, which is located 14 kilometers from El Salvador, will also affect that neighboring nation. According to experts, the waste dumped by the mine would reach the Lempa River, the main Salvadoran tributary.

The current government indicated that anomalies were found such as allegedly false signatures and the loss of more than 900 pages of the original Cerro Blanco project file.

They also pointed out that the change from underground to open-air exploitation system is a different project with great environmental impact, which will require a new study.

The cancellation of the license is a first victory for environmental groups in both Guatemala and El Salvador, who have also denounced the dangers of open pit mining for the populations of both countries and have supported the fight of the Guatemalan community of Asunción Mita.

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