

Colombia Suspends 516 Mining Projects



Bogota, May 22 (teleSUR-RHC)-- The Colombian government has suspended 516 mining contracts in the country because the mining companies failed to consult local communities about the projects, thus violating their human rights.

The 516 projects combined represent an area of some 20,471,346 hectares located throughout Colombia, but mainly in the east and west. Combined, they cover more than 20 percent of the country.

The suspension of the mining contracts were ordered after a local social justice and environmental organization *Tierra Digna* (Dignified Earth) began to question the legality of the mining projects and the government's involvement in signing the contracts.

According to *Tierra Digna*, the mining companies operating in the region were violating laws dictating that local communities must be consulted prior to any nearby mineral or oil extraction projects. These consultations are then meant to be included in the company's administrative and development plans for the extraction process.

The lack of consultation meant the mining projects deeply affected the livelihoods of local populations – many of which were rural, agricultural communities or environmental conversationalists.

Due to the increased pressures, the Ministry of Mines and Energy and the National Mining Agency issued the request to suspend 516 projects in their areas. The suspension was then officially ordered May 15th by the State Council – Colombia's highest administrative court and government advisory body.

Tierra Digna and other rights organizations have long been fighting for environmental and social justice rights in the country around extraction projects, particularly in the Choco, Amazon and the Colombian Massif regions.

The court's decision comes just one week after a mine collapsed in Colombia's northwestern province of Caldas, trapping 15 miners at least 10 feet underground for days. Colombian officials and activists have since called for better mining regulations and controls in the country.

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