

Debate on controversial mining project is reactivated in Peru

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By María Josefina Arce

Several Peruvian governments have tried to implement the controversial Tia Maria copper mining project and all of them, without exception, have clashed with the resistance of the population of the Tambo Valley, in the province of Islay, department of Arequipa, in the south of the country.

Now the coup government of the appointed president Dina Boluarte has hinted its interest in reactivating the plan, which over the years has caused protests and clashes with the authorities.

Tia Maria is the oldest social conflict in Arequipa. In 2009, in a referendum, almost the entire population voted against the project because of the damage it would cause to agriculture and the environment.

However, several attempts have been made to put it into operation. As a result from 2011 to 2015, clashes between police forces and protesters were recorded in the area, as well as several stoppages

In 2019, a new strike was held in the region, the fourth since the conflict began and which lasted more than 100 days.

The people of Islay claim that the mining project would put at risk more than 13 thousand hectares of crops that supply food to four million Peruvians.

The danger of contamination of water resources is another of the allegations made by the inhabitants of the area against the implementation of the Tia Maria open pit mine.

People, animals and economic activities in the region are supplied with water from the Tambo River and its canals, which in periods of low water levels have high concentrations of chloride, aluminum and lead, a situation that could be aggravated by the mine's operation.

During the 2021 election campaign, Boluarte, then vice-presidential candidate, signed a commitment with the Tambo Valley population, in which she guaranteed the definitive cancellation of the Tia Maria mining project.

However, now as the appointed president, after the coup d'état of December 2022 against the elected president Pedro Castillo, she has once again forgotten her commitments to the Peruvian people.

The authorities of Arequipa have advocated the promotion of other economic activities such as tourism and agriculture. They have made clear their rejection of the Tia Maria project because of its negative consequences for the inhabitants of the region.

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