

Dominican Army Opens Fire on Environmental Activists



Santo Domingo, May 13 (teleSUR-RHC)-- The Dominican army opened fire on demonstrators this week, when they were protesting a spate of mysterious fires on the *Loma Miranda* mountainside that is owned by a local mining company.

Protesters gathered at the foot of the mountain on Sunday and tried to ascend it in attempts to help put the fire out that had been blazing since Thursday. According to local media reports, the military was preventing the environmentalists from entering the site, while allowing employees from the local mining company Falcondo to ascend.

The company owns 621 acres of the almost 700 acres affected by the fire. As protesters refused to leave, the army then opened fire on the protesters without warning, according to local activists. "Suddenly security forces started to shoot people. Three teachers were injured by birdshots," Pedro Caba, an environmental activist at the protest Sunday, told local media.

More than a dozen activists were then arrested for demanding that Falcondo withdraw their machines and vacate the area. The mountain has been a controversial region since Dominican President Danilo Medina last year recalled a Senate decision to declare the area a national park, after pressure from the mining industry wanting to exploit the area.

President Medina said that giving the area a national park status would violate the constitution by hurting the country's investment interests. Since Medina's decision, local residents, environmentalists and members of the clergy have founded a camp at the base of Loma Miranda in attempts to protect the area from mining exploitation.

The activists maintain that the recent fires were set intentionally by Falcondo in attempts to clear the area to make it easier to move heavy equipment and make roads. Falcondo has denied such allegations, saying they are caring for the area. "The fact is we are not mining at Loma Miranda — there is no mining going on," said Peter Fuchs, a spokesman for Glencore, Falcondo's parent company.

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