

IGNORING ITS OWN PROMISES: CANADA MUST ACT FOR CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY!



Juan Daniel Pacheco showing polluted water near Excellon's La Platosa mine.

Located in Durango, Mexico, the community of La Sierrita had entered into a lease agreement with Canadian mining company Excellon Resources to extract the silver in its soil, promising prosperity to an impoverished rural area. When Juan Daniel Pacheco Álvarez and other members of the community found out that the company had violated the agreement and worried that its water and land were polluted by the mining operation, they set up a peaceful blockade to demand respect for their rights. Those events took place close to 10 years ago, but Juan Daniel remembers very well how security guards came to violently to dismantle the blockade, injuring protesters along the way. "Since then, there has still been no court judgment in our favour, preventing us from accessing justice," says Juan Daniel. "Our ask is simple: we want the Government of Canada to make itself responsible for the actions of its extractive industry."



La Sierrita is an ejido, a name for communally owned land in Mexico.

The story of La Sierrita is unfortunately far from unique. Communities around the world are faced with similar dynamics when they try to assert their rights with Canadian corporations operating abroad. More often than not, the massive imbalance of power at play makes it virtually impossible for victims to seek remedy in their own countries. This is why the CNCA (Canadian Network for Corporate Accountability), of which the Steelworkers Humanity Fund (SHF) is an active member, was cautiously optimistic when the Minister of International Trade announced the creation of the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Business Enterprise (CORE). The government promised that the CORE would have the necessary power "to investigate allegations of human rights abuses linked to Canadian corporate activity abroad."

Three years have passed since. The CORE is now set to open its office to complaints, but the government has reneged on its commitment – effectively making the CORE an empty shell. This means that individuals and communities that have been harmed by the activities of Canadian companies

abroad still have nowhere to turn for help. This situation has been denounced by the SHF and fellow CNCA members for a long time. But on February 25, a leaked report showed that experts commissioned by the Government of Canada itself are also saying the same thing: in order to be effective, the CORE needs to have the necessary powers.

The conclusions of the McIsaac report continue to be ignored by the government. It is a clear demonstration of how the Government of Canada is prone to cave in to pressure from business when it comes to corporate accountability. Although it prides itself as a human rights defender on the global level, the continued broken promises at the heart of the CORE's mandate are yet another display of how Canada falls short of its public commitment to human rights. But as long as communities like La Sierrita in Mexico continue their struggle for justice, so will civil society organizations and their allies in Canada continue to fight to empower the CORE.

In early February a CNCA delegation, including Ken Neumann, met with Minister Ng to again press the government to make good on their commitment to an empowered CORE.

Photo credits: Joshua Berson



Community activists met with a SHF delegation to La Sierrita in 2013.



To learn more about the
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