

The Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA denounces the attempted assassination of community leader and anti-mining activist, Yolanda “Yoli” Oquelí.

On June 13th, at approximately 6:30pm, Yolanda “Yoli” Oquelí was ambushed by two men on a motorcycle while driving to her home in San José del Golfo. She was shot at repeatedly; one bullet entered above her right kidney.

Yoli was immediately rushed to a public hospital by community members where she underwent emergency surgery.

Yoli has been a vocal and passionate opponent of the installation of extractive mining operations in the communities of San Jose del Golfo and San Pedro Ayampuc. Her inspiring leadership is just one example of the coordinated efforts of men, women and children in these communities to say “NO” to mining and its potentially devastating effects on local drinking water, farming land and the environment in general.

However, two international corporations refuse to respect the will of these communities: the Canadian mining corporation Radius Gold and the U.S. engineering firm Kappes, Cassiday & Associates. Through their Guatemalan subsidiary Exploraciones Mineras de Guatemala (Exmingua) they continue to push their open-pit and underground gold mining operation known as the Tambor Mine.

On March 2, 2012, local residents started a roadblock in order to prevent tractors, excavators and other mining equipment from entering their communities. Those who take turns guarding the roadblock have sworn to embrace the practice of nonviolent, peaceful resistance in defense of their rights.

On May 8th, a caravan of mining machinery, accompanied by hundreds of Guatemalan riot police, arrived in the middle of the night in an attempt to break the roadblock. They were unsuccessful.

Days before the attempt on her life, Yoli and other pro-environment activists presented a series of formal complaints to the Public Ministry regarding acts of intimidation, threats, and criminalization that they have suffered as a result of their defense of their natural resources.

Since the attack, Yoli's supporters have been asking the Guatemalan Government to provide Yoli, her family, and other community members with security to prevent further attacks. So far, the Government has refused to do so.

To the Guatemala Government and the International community, GHRC declares:

* We denounce and condemn this latest attack on the brave women and men who, through the use of peaceful protest and nonviolent demonstration, are defending their rights to clean water, a healthy environment, and self-determination.

* We call on the Guatemalan authorities to investigate, capture, and prosecute all those responsible for this heinous crime; the hired guns as well as those who planned the assassination.

* We insist that authorities guarantee the safety and well-being of the community members of San José del Golfo and San Pedro Ayampuc and to find a negotiated solution to this conflict which prioritizes the needs of the Guatemalan people over the profits of international corporations.



* GHRC stands in solidarity with Yolanda and wishes her a quick and complete recovery. We offer our heartfelt sympathy for her family, especially her two young children, for the fear and trauma that this attacked most assuredly had provoked.

Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA
Washington, DC
June 15, 2012