



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# **Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development**

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SDIR • NUMBER 051 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, March 21, 2017**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Michael Levitt**



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• (1305)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.))** Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the Subcommittee on International Human Rights.

We have some guests with us, but before we begin, I just want to mention that the subcommittee returned from a visit to Washington, D.C., the week before last. Without going in depth about the trip, which was very successful, I want to recognize the immense efforts of our clerk and analysts in preparing us for that trip, dealing with the logistics and really having that trip run as smoothly as it did. I know it took a lot of work. The very fact that we had close to 18 meetings over a day and a half is testament to the hard work put in by the three of you.

I know that all members of this subcommittee will recognize those efforts.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**The Chair:** Good. It also means we get to propose going on another trip, since that one was so successful. That's a topic for another day.

This was MP Hardcastle's request. She has obviously been very active on this file. When we received the request from Common Frontiers Canada to hear from these two gentlemen, Bernardo Belloso and Aleisar Arana Morales, we certainly worked as a committee and made the time to have you come and speak to us on the important issues that you laid out in the briefing.

I just want to give you some background. Mr. Belloso is the president of the Association for the Development of El Salvador. He has been a rural activist since 1995, notably in a campaign against sugar cane plantations in the lower Lempa delta. The CRIPDES leads resistance against mining projects of the region of Chalatenango in El Salvador. Mr. Belloso has travelled through North America, South America, and Europe, advocating for communities affected by mining.

I would like to welcome you Mr. Belloso.

Mr. Morales is the leader of the Xinca Parliament in Guatemala. The Xinca people are indigenous to Guatemala. The Xinca Parliament is composed of 13 organizations and 20 communities spread through southern Guatemala, representing more than 500,000

Xinca and successfully leading local referenda against mining projects.

I would just add that I was pleased to be able to travel to Guatemala last August with the foreign affairs committee. We did a trip to Guatemala and Colombia. We got to spend some time in rural Guatemala, so I have a real sense of the lay of the land. We got to have some really important meetings with civil society on a number of issues.

Again, Mr. Morales, I welcome you on behalf of the entire committee.

Gentlemen, if you would like to take around 10 to 15 minutes to provide testimony, then we can open up the floor to some questions, if that's acceptable.

Please, you have the floor.

**Mr. Aleisar Arana Morales (President, Xinca Parliament) (Interpretation):** Good afternoon. My name is Aleisar Arana. I am from Quesada, in the department of Jutiapa in Guatemala.

I am currently the president of the Xinca Parliament of the people of Guatemala. In 2012, I was also elected as president of the Xinca indigenous community of Quesada. In 2014, I was elected president of the Xinca Parliament, and I am representing that parliament here today.

I am very proud of the land that I love with all my heart.

The Xinca Parliament is made up of 13 communities. We bring together more than 500,000 people. We have our own communal lands. We have title to those lands, and we administer them according to our ancestral knowledge. The Parliament's purpose is to protect our land and to respect the free determination of our peoples. Our land, our territory, our people are seeing their rights violated with a number of extractive projects, in particular, by Tahoe Resources. Without consulting us—and we as a people have a right to be consulted—Tahoe has arrived to impose extractive industry projects on our communities. It is worth mentioning that in many of our communities we have organized our forces, have consulted internally, and have the right to be consulted. The municipal bylaw in article 64 states that we are entitled to be consulted.

In Quesada, in my community, we held a consultation. We asked the municipal council to organize it. It requires a procedure, which is also laid out. It requires 10% of the signatures of all those concerned, namely the voters, on a petition that is presented to the municipal council. With those signatures, the municipal council authorizes the consultation. It was authorized by the municipal council and took place on May 8 of last year. The result of the consultation was an outright “no” to mining. More than 99% of the population said no. Only 0.7% said yes.

This consultation process has also taken place in another seven municipalities, where the entire population have said no. Why is that? Well, it is because we oppose the development of our communities in this way because these projects affect us. The natural resources that we have.... And as indigenous peoples, we have a very strong link to nature, because nature gives us life. There is the right to water, which is a right that we must all have. It is a right that we must all fight for. What Guatemala is doing, what Central America is doing, what a number of countries in the world are doing, is fighting for that right.

●(1310)

I also want to say that it's not just the Xinca people, because the Xinca people are a minority in Guatemala. There are also the Maya people. The Maya represent more than 70% of the Guatemalan population, and they are also against these mining projects.

These projects and their imposition have led to the persecution of community leaders. In many cases there have been criminal charges against our leaders. They have been put in jail. Others are being persecuted and are in hiding, so that they aren't caught.

The outcome of all this has been a conflict, and it's growing, because we rely on agriculture for our livelihoods. We produce food, we have livestock, and we produce milk. With the mining licences that are granted, there are 60 of them for an area that is very small. That is where they would like to set up mining, and leave us without land for agriculture. That is why the Xinca people are advocating, so that the resources there can be part of the right to the life we need.

I can also tell you that the former president of the Xinca Parliament was under an arrest warrant. He was persecuted. He was in hiding for a long time. Then he went to the authorities and stood before a judge, and they had no evidence against him. The prosecutor did not have any crimes to charge him with, so they released him. Who ended up persecuting him was the former minister of the interior, López Bonilla. I think you know about this. He's being accused of corruption and drug trafficking.

In the former administration of Otto Perez Molina, there was an entire team—you could even say a team of criminals—that persecuted our people.

We are here to speak to you and ask you to take a closer look, as much as possible, at Canadian companies, particularly Tahoe Resources, because these companies are causing a great deal of harm and a great deal of pollution. They are creating a situation in which we do not know what we will do, because our communities are resisting. We are resisting peacefully, because we are not a violent people. We are a people who love peace, a people who are seeking to be respected and have their rights respected.

●(1315)

I can also tell you that the well-being of countries like mine—developing countries seeking progress for their people—depends on you. We know that we do need projects, but please, they should not be mining projects and iron ore extraction projects. The situation in Guatemala is a terrible one. We are being threatened. Our resources are being lost. The forests are on the verge of disappearing. That is why we wish to say a resounding “no” to these companies.

Thank you very much.

**Mr. Bernardo Beloso (President, Association for the Development of El Salvador) (Interpretation):** Thank you, Aleisar.

Good afternoon, members, friends, and parliamentary assistants. It is an honour for me to be here and to share my experiences with you. I want to talk to you about a number of violent acts and fundamental abuses of human rights in Central America and, in particular, in El Salvador.

My name is Bernardo Beloso. I am the president of CRIPDES, which brings together approximately 300 communities in seven of the departments that make up the 14 departments in El Salvador. We work in about 350 communities, so it represents about 30,000 people.

We always try to promote human rights and search for alternative development for these communities while we work in those seven departments. El Salvador is a very small country in Central America of approximately 20,000 square kilometres, and almost seven million Salvadoreans live there. That means that on this land, which is inhabited, a number of projects are being carried out that violate human rights and impinge on the structure of natural resources.

There is the threat of exploitation of the mineral resources underground. We are in a critical situation. Water, groundwater, and water above ground are contaminated, making us very vulnerable, according to studies carried out by the Ministry of the Environment. The future holds a number of problems for our society in this regard.

Since 2000 we have been working in communities developing awareness-raising and information campaigns for the population to try to find alternative ways of developing those communities. A number of alternative projects were developed that are environmentally friendly and that have to do with agricultural production: meat, milk, grain, fruit, and vegetables. In other words, we have developed an alternative economy in our communities and in 2000 a number of companies arrived in El Salvador with the idea of being able to develop mining projects.

Most of those companies in the 29 areas for which mining concessions have been granted are Canadian, American, and Australian; but most of them are Canadian. What does that mean? Based on the different companies that were given concessions for mining exploration in the northern part of the country in particular, where the main water sources for the rest of the population are located, that area is under threat.

Some of the impacts that have been generated by the exploration by these companies can be enumerated, and we have denounced them. There is environmental destruction, as water has been contaminated and forests have been destroyed as well.

However, the main source of local problems has been the increased insecurity and the persecution of environmental leaders who defend their territories, their lands, and their lives.

• (1320)

In El Salvador, as recently as 2009, more than four community leaders were assassinated. The population cried out against this through local institutions. The investigations carried out by the people themselves found that these were linked to processes carried out by the mining companies.

There were a number of local problems, and it's true that we have problems locally. There's insecurity. There are a number of minority populations, and of course, there is drug trafficking. Well, the companies used those problems as a pretext, and this was something that the population that was directly affected denounced. Steps were taken using the relevant institutions to push these investigations forward to find those responsible for the murders. Marcelo and Dora, who was six months pregnant, were murdered as well. They were murdered, and they were murdered with impunity. That is what we want to highlight, because it is important for you to know what is going on so that you can demand that the companies issue a true report of what's happening in the territories where they operate.

There are also a number of problems with regard to the increase in corruption, particularly in the public sector, because, as you may know, mining companies, particularly Pacific Rim, start out by purchasing political will not only from the local political authorities but also from leaders who oppose mining projects. We have been caught in that dynamic, and we find it hard to generate the kind of support we need in the population.

There is an argument to the effect that mining is good and generates development, but I think that in El Salvador, and in other countries, we say that we're against mining. Why are we against these mining projects? First of all, nowhere in the country have mining companies have carried out their projects without harming natural resources, without destroying forests, without polluting water, without generating violence, and without generating corruption. The saddest thing about all of this is that I know of no place in the country where the companies have not dispersed the local population, particularly the indigenous population. That is of great concern in El Salvador.

Second, mining in El Salvador does not help resolve social conflict. It does not contribute to the economy of our country, either. It generates more poverty, more insecurity, and more destruction of natural resources.

As I already mentioned, El Salvador is a very vulnerable country. El Salvador is the country in Central America that is the most impacted by climate change, with droughts, floods, and landslides. Right now, the stress caused by water scarcity is also creating social problems, because the population does not have the water it needs to survive.

• (1325)

**The Chair:** You have two more minutes.

**Mr. Bernardo Beloso (Interpretation):** We think it is very important to listen to the population when it denounces the threats

and the actions of major companies. What companies do is resort to international conventions.

As you know, there was a 250 million dollars lawsuit in El Salvador against Pacific Rim. Really, it's a battle between David and Goliath. I would like to tell you what happened there. We are defending our land, but the company continues to go to the tribunals and the courts and continues to harm the natural resources, which will create more poverty and destroy our natural resources even more.

**The Chair:** Mr. Beloso, I would just interject at this point, because I want to have time for the members to ask you questions, and we're going to run out of that shortly. If you can take another 30 seconds just to wrap up, we can get to some of the questions that I know the members around the table want to ask.

**Mr. Bernardo Beloso (Interpretation):** Yes, of course. Thank you.

What I was saying was that when the local population defend the land, the companies start to make demands on the state. They have tried to use trade agreements that were signed in the past to protect themselves, but we saw in response to a suit at the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes a decision that Pacific Rim and OceanaGold had actually been destroying resources. They continued to operate and to explore and continued to promote corruption of public authorities.

Given that, we ask you to intervene in these problems caused by Canadian companies and to see how we can help protect the fundamental rights that are being violated in countries like El Salvador.

Thank you very much.

• (1330)

**The Chair:** My thanks to both of you.

We'll get right to questions.

We're going to begin with MP Sweet.

**Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I just want to express my concern with regard to this meeting. My understanding is that it's only a one-off meeting. I don't doubt the allegations that have been made, but that's not the point. The point is that these allegations are very wide-sweeping and serious. We have an act that deals with the corruption of foreign officials and these allegations go to an offence that's very serious. I'm concerned that there's an ongoing lawsuit.

I guess the best thing to begin with is to ask Mr. Morales the following. Could you tell me, Mr. Morales, if you are one of the seven people who have filed the lawsuit in Vancouver with regard to Tahoe Resources?

**Mr. Aleisar Arana Morales (Interpretation):** No.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Do you represent them at all? Did you get legal advice before you came to testify before us?

**Mr. Aleisar Arana Morales (Interpretation):** No, I am here to talk about the experience we had in Guatemala. Our legal advisers could give far more information about that.

**Mr. David Sweet:** I understand that. My concern is, sir, that you would compromise the case that is being dealt by your testimony here before the committee, but if you feel that you want to go ahead, then I'm fine with it.

You mentioned that on May 8 last year, an overwhelming majority of the people, some 99% voted—I think you said you represent 14 communities in your country—no to any mining. The previous concerns date way back to 2014, or probably previous to that. That was when the lawsuit was filed. Give me an idea about why it took so long for this referendum to happen in your communities and for them to say no to the mining.

**Mr. Aleisar Arana Morales (Interpretation):** I would like to explain. The Xinca Parliament represents 13 communities: Jutiapa, Jalapa, Santa Rosa. Those are three departments. I am from the municipality of Quesada, which is being threatened, and there are two licences being granted: one for El Silencio, which is an reconnaissance licence; and one for Teresa, which is an exploration licence. My municipality is about 15,000 people strong. The municipality is where the consultation took place. It's not in the region represented by a parliament.

**Mr. David Sweet:** So, then, we're talking about a future mine, not the existing Tahoe facility.

**Mr. Aleisar Arana Morales (Interpretation):** That's right, it's for future projects that are under way, because when a licence is approved for mining exploitation, we have to try to get ahead of it and have a consultation, because a mining company is not supposed to start operating before a consultation has taken place, but in this case we did it as a way of resisting the operations of the mining company.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Mr. Belloso mentioned that they had raised their issues with the El Salvadorian government.

Did you raise the issues with your government, and did you contact any other Canadian officials before this committee in regard to the corporate social responsibility counsellor? Did you have any interaction with that office to hold these mining companies to account?

•(1335)

**Mr. Bernardo Belloso (Interpretation):** I would say that we could not wait to be threatened or murdered in our community before we could go ahead and denounce what was happening, because I know that in El Salvador, and I think I speak for Aleisar as well, the mining companies threaten our communities. One of the main things that mining companies do in our communities is to buy out leaders and to generate corruption. In the case of El Salvador, it's public officials who are being bought out.

We have not acted with any parliamentarians. We have acted with organizations that are concerned about the problems that exist in our country, and we have looked for places and opportunities to tell you our story. We were allowed to visit Canada, and what do we have to do? We have to find a way of expressing what is actually happening in our communities, because you may have a solution to propose. That is what we are here to talk about, not just for communities and populations in Latin America and Central America, but there are also organizations here in Canada that are saying it's important to work on solving environmental problems and human rights problems that

exist because of the mining industry, which is destroying natural resources. So that is why we think it's a good time to tell you about this. We're here and we're very happy to be able to talk about all that is concerning us in our communities.

I am not a lawyer or a technician or a geologist. What I'm saying is that our communities have demands, they are being threatened day to day, and our position is to present that, and that is what I wanted to share with you.

**Mr. David Sweet:** That question was actually for Mr. Morales.

All I wanted to do was make sure that we got on record whether you had some communication with the first level of accountability, and that's with the corporate social responsibility office. It is charged, as a Canadian authority, to deal with companies who are not fulfilling reasonable obligations in your country.

**Mr. Aleisar Arana Morales (Interpretation):** No.

**Mr. David Sweet:** You had no contact with them?

**Mr. Aleisar Arana Morales (Interpretation):** My contact was with a university, with Western University here in Canada.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, MP Sweet.

For the second question, I will go to MP Tabbara.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be splitting my time with Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Morales, you mentioned early in your statement that you needed to be consulted. Can you give examples of maybe other central American countries where there has been a lot of consultation and where it's been effective?

**Mr. Aleisar Arana Morales (Interpretation):** Our neighbouring country is El Salvador, and there were five consultations carried out there.

In Guatemala, we've held eight consultations. As I said, we have the municipal bylaws here, and then there's also the ILO convention 169, which establishes our right to consultation. It is a fundamental right that we demand and that we are carrying out according to our rights and according to the free determination of our peoples.

•(1340)

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** Have the governments in Central America considered or passed laws that better regulate the extractive sector?

**Mr. Aleisar Arana Morales (Interpretation):** Until now the issue of a mining law... Well, yes, there is a mining law, but it goes against our interests. The law was drafted in congress, and some of the members of parliament are not members from the people. They should be since they're elected. We're the ones who vote them in, but they are co-opted by the companies, so that they draft laws that are not in the interests of the people.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** So again, it goes back to consultation. The communication is not there. The people on the ground, the communities that are affected, are not hearing the voices. Their voices are not being heard by the higher levels of government.

**Mr. Aleisar Arana Morales (Interpretation):** Of the eight consultations that have been carried out in municipalities, in the area that I represent, six of them went all the way to the constitutional court. That court said that the consultations are binding. This is something that helps us, because the constitutional court has recognized the people's right to consultation.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** I have in my notes here that El Salvador has the largest deposits of gold, but has not allowed foreign companies to establish mines to exploit this gold.

Mr. Belloso, could you elaborate on that?

**Mr. Bernardo Belloso (Interpretation):** Yes, that's right. In our country we consider, and the population in general has expressed the idea, that mining is not viable because of its impact on natural resources. As I said earlier, El Salvador is in a very precarious environmental situation. This forces us to generate policies and laws to conserve the few natural resources that we have left. Yes, it's true that gold is good for economic development, but who will that development profit and benefit? Will it be the people, the countries, or multinational companies?

In El Salvador, of every \$100 the companies earn through their mining exploitation, they only leave two-thirds. Then when they leave, everything they leave behind is destroyed and polluted. Who then will help resolve the environmental problems that we are left with? Well, it's the government and the population.

If you take the San Sebastián mine, the mining company left the water completely contaminated. The population has to pay for it, including \$10 a day for a barrel of water. So what's better? I think it's better to leave the gold in the ground rather than extracting it and causing greater social problems.

The day a company says that it will exploit this gold and that there will be no destruction of the forests, that it will not destroy our land, and that it will not contaminate the water, then we'll think about it, but we've not seen any instance like that yet. Even Canadian companies have done it.

I know that if in El Salvador the situation were better, we would be here presenting a totally different story, but there is a problem in El Salvador, and we want there to be a law to completely prevent mining.

**The Chair:** Mr. Fragiskatos, you have a minute.

• (1345)

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.):** Very good. A minute.

Maybe we'll circle back, but if not I just wanted to make the general point that as far as regulatory aspects are concerned with respect to trade issues, that issue falls under the purview of the international trade committee and not this committee. However, recognizing that there are human rights issues at play, we can and should look at those.

Hearing the testimony today, I don't get the sense that any mining would be acceptable, which presents one perspective. In the summertime we—you were there too, Mr. Chair—visited Guatemala and Colombia as part of our work in the foreign affairs committee. We spoke to many people on the ground, individuals who favour a

perspective that you put forward. But there are many at the same time who are quite open to mining, under certain conditions whereby companies engaging in that type of work provide for development, including schools, hospitals, and roads. We saw evidence of that. We saw evidence of companies acting appropriately.

I've probably taken 45 seconds now, but if we do circle back, I would like to ask a question on co-operative agriculture, since the view appears to be that you're opposed to mining entirely. There was a comment in your testimony indicating that you're open to co-operative agriculture. I know this federal government has contributed a great deal of financial resources in support of co-operative agriculture in Latin America.

I would love to hear your views on that. In Guatemala, I remember going and speaking to a number of farmers working on coffee plantations who are quite excited about the model of co-operative farming and its promise for Guatemala. The same is true in Colombia, from what we saw.

I'll leave it there. If we circle back, I'd love to hear your view. I think the testimony is skewed in one direction because, from from my experience, there are others who have put forward a different perspective, who are more open to mining, who are on the ground working for democracy and economic rights, generally speaking.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now move to MP Hardcastle.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wish we were using this opportunity here to get the perspective of those people. We know that there is a study coming up. This is a very important committee. It deals with international human rights, but we don't have a large budget. When there are opportunities when people like you visit, Mr. Morales and Mr. Belloso, and for the benefit of the rest of the committee, we do take advantage of having people come to talk to us.

You can see by the tone of the questions from my colleagues here today, we do have a lot to explore. There is a lot of misunderstanding and misrepresentation about the voluntary system that we now have. As you probably know, and as many of us here know, this is why Canada is an attractive base country for mining.

I would like to ask you some questions now so that I will be able to refer to your answers when we have a fulsome discussion about what our role is in international human rights and in engaging the extractive industries based in Canada.

What I would like to ask each of you—you can decide who's going to answer first—is about this idea the criminalization of community leaders who speak up about issues, such as why we are against mining, as one of my colleagues brought up. If someone starts a movement in a community to bring up the reasons why you are against mining, they're criminalized. I'm not just making that as a statement. I would like you to answer and to back that up to give our committee understanding about what happens.

Whether it's under President Otto Pérez or another leader, there has been an administrative history now in which we have progressed to this criminalization of community leaders speaking out peacefully.

So please, explain more.

**Mr. Aleisar Arana Morales (Interpretation):** Government officials want to keep our people in complete darkness and ignorance. What community leaders do is bring information to our communities about what is happening. That is how our people are becoming empowered and demanding their rights. When the people demand their rights, then we can get somewhere because this is their means to advance, to have the people become empowered and demand what they are entitled to.

In Guatemala what interests us, and that is how we will move forward, is education and health care. But what has happened? The member was saying that schools and roads have been created by mining companies. This is true, but I would ask those mining companies if it's up to them to set up schools. Isn't it up to the government to do that? The government is responsible for education but hasn't invested in it, and that is what we demand as well.

In Guatemala, if people get sick, for anyone who does not have the economic resources to get health care, their only option is to die. If you go to the hospital, there is no medication there for you. Community leaders demand those rights among others, and that is why we are persecuted. That's why many of us have been eliminated because the government does not want our people to progress through education.

That is what I have to say.

Thank you very much.

• (1350)

**Mr. Bernardo Beloso (Interpretation):** In our countries, in developing countries, criminalization has become more and more of an issue in recent years. There are a number of factors that contribute to that, but with regard to criminality in Central America and El Salvador, companies have come in and used the problem of the high crime rate in our countries to cover their tracks when they threaten leaders.

When it comes to resisting—not so much resisting, but defending the people's rights—before the mining companies arrived, we didn't have a high crime rate the way we do now; we didn't have the level of insecurity that we have now. If you know about what's happening to the people in Cabañas, I think you would be frightened. I would ask you to visit El Salvador to hear not only the position of communities, but also that of the government, which is also against mining companies. The law against mining companies has not yet been passed, but it sees the issue in the same way.

With regard to corporate social responsibility, with all due respect I can say that I do not know of any company that is socially responsible in El Salvador, particularly in the mining sector. Aleisar was saying that they are creating projects. The companies are trying to create small social projects, but what kinds of projects? They can perhaps outfit a baseball team, something like that, but that's not sustainable in the long term. The companies talk about green mining. They talk about responsible mining. They talk about mining for development. They also talk about using mining as a way of eradicating poverty, but what happens is when the mining projects are over and the companies leave, the situation is far more complicated with regard to health care, with regard to education, and the poverty is even more acute.

Have mining companies been socially responsible? The answer is no. I can tell you very sincerely that I do not want that situation for the future generations in my country, so something has to be done.

We have to demand that mining companies be truly responsible, and if the communities tell those companies that they don't want mining, then there should be no projects. Seventy-eight per cent of the population in El Salvador have spoken out and stated that there should be no mining. There have been five consultations in El Salvador nationally, and 99% of the people who participated in that national survey said no. But the companies continue to go ahead and explore.

I have to say, with all due respect, that those companies are not being socially responsible.

• (1355)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Beloso.

We have about four and a half minutes left. We will go back to Mr. Fragiskatos. You were mid-thought.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Before I touch on the issue of co-operative agriculture, I'll say that a lot of what I've heard today relates to a deficit of democracy in Guatemala and El Salvador. That issue in and of itself should be looked at and studied. I'm supportive of efforts at democratization anywhere. I've been on the ground in Guatemala, and yes, that country is experiencing a great number of issues. Certainly, democratic advocates have a right to appear in Canada and make their case, but I'm not so sure that issue can be looked at intertwined with the issue of mining. Those are two separate issues.

My view is that you might get much further in your efforts for democracy and human rights by focusing on dealing with the democratic deficit rather than by mingling it with issues related to the extractive sector. That's a separate point.

Can you touch on the co-operative model of agriculture? That approach to development holds a great deal of promise, and as I said, this federal government has contributed a great deal of financial resources that to local organizations, NGOs, that are working with peasant farmers in places such as Guatemala. The chair and I saw it on the ground. It has tremendous promise for the future of the country.



**Mr. Aleisar Arana Morales (Interpretation):** I think it is an alternative. My people are farmers, and co-operative farming can be a way forward for Guatemala. We need a great deal of support, because although we say we are farmers, we don't have the technology to progress. Equipment is very scarce, for example, for more progressive and advanced agriculture.

Another issue I wanted to raise was that agriculture through monoculture has affected Guatemala. When it comes to sugar cane, I think Guatemala is potentially a big producer of sugar, but what's happening is that the rivers are being diverted to irrigate the sugar cane plantations, and those who live off fishing and livestock don't have the water they need. That's one problem.

There is another monoculture, the African palm, which is affecting a sector of our country. Yes, it is creating jobs, but how much is being paid to those who work in that sector? Hardly anything.... People's need to make money is being exploited. If I need to feed my children and I am being paid 25 quetzals, I will take it, even though it's not enough to live on.

● (1400)

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** I know the chair wants to make a point. All I will say is that I asked about co-operative agriculture because I am trying to find some common ground and end on a positive note. I think mining does have a potentially positive impact. I wanted to put something forward that I think we can agree on, and that is the benefits of agriculture, specifically co-operative agriculture.

Thank you very much for that.

**The Chair:** I have a quick point further to that of MP Fragiskatos. We visited a couple of agricultural co-ops. One of them was a project specifically aimed at empowering women farmers in the watermelon growth sector. We went out and visited the field. It was a group of women in rural Guatemala who had been working with local farmers, funded by money from Canada, to empower and train them in growing and selling watermelon.

One of our other visits was to the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala, a very highly respected commission

in Guatemala and has brought about a regime change. I believe it brought down one president.

You talked about corruption amongst government officials. It's not something I raised because it wasn't part of our discussion. Is this something that the commission on impunity in Guatemala is actively looking at? Are they studying this issue? I know they are quite effective, but I know they are not actively engaged in all parts, and probably not as much in rural Guatemala.

**Mr. Aleisar Arana Morales (Interpretation):** Yes, the commission on impunity is doing good work, but it is not going to the high elites who are violating the rights of our people. I was talking about monoculture and monopolies. There is co-optation of the media as well, because we are not given coverage in the media and the information doesn't get out. Only the information that the leaders think people need to hear is transmitted and broadcast through the media, and that gets in the way of people really finding out what's going on.

Our voice is often not heard. I remember that during our consultation we held a press conference, and we invited all of the local media representatives. I can tell you that only one representative of the local media covered the consultation and was there to inform the population. The rest simply didn't show up, because they ignore us or they think it is not relevant. We think they are actually on the payroll of some elites who don't recognize what we have to express.

**The Chair:** We're out of time, but to both witnesses, I sincerely thank you for your testimony today. I also want to thank the individuals from Common Frontiers Canada for contacting our subcommittee and for arranging to have you here today.

Finally, I want to thank MP Hardcastle for her continued work in this area and for advocating and bringing to our attention the fact that you would be in town.

Thanks to all of you for your participation. With that, I'm going to adjourn.

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