

## PRESS RELEASE

### ***SOLIDARITY WEEK WITH EL SALVADOR: NO to mining and YES to life!***

Ottawa, March 29th, 2010. **The Coalition against gold mining in El Salvador of Ottawa-Gatineau** organized the Week of Solidarity with El Salvador to support the people of Trinidad and San Isidro, Department of Cabañas, who face death threats and violence because they have decided to defend their environment from the gold mining project by **Pacific Rim**, a Canadian mining corporation. After large demonstrations at the national level, and daily death threats and assassination of movement leaders, the Salvadoran Government



declared in 2009 that will not allow gold mining in El Salvador. The Pacific Rim business has since launched an arbitration proceeding against the government of El Salvador, demanding a payment of \$ 200 million in compensation for "breach of legal obligations" under the binding NAFTA CAFTA-DR. During the week several successful activities were organized in solidarity with the Salvadoran people for their right to say no to mining and if life!

The week started with the conference "Free trade: the new El Dorado of Canadian mining companies?" held on March 23<sup>rd</sup> at the University of Ottawa. More than a hundred people attended to hear the testimony of Bernardo **Belloso of the National Roundtable against Gold Mining in El Salvador (Mesa)**, winner of the 2009 international Lettelier-Moffit Award for the defence of human rights. Belloso informed the audience that the communities have been affected and are opposed to mining activities in the region of Cabañas by the Canadian company Pacific Rim. The *Mesa* would like to see the statements made by the Salvadoran Government made law but at the moment is working to change certain sections of the existing mining law. They have also demanded the General Attorney's office a thorough investigation into the murder of three environmental activists Marcelo Rivera, Ramiro Recinos Sorto and Dora Alicia Rivera (8 months pregnant). Also as guests speakers were **Deputy for Ottawa-centre Paul Dewar** and **Jamie Kneen of Mining Watch Canada**. They explained that Canadians cannot be indifferent to what is happening in El Salvador and that we should support Bill C-300 by calling our Canadian Members of Parliament. If this bill is made law, it will allow some more accountability from Canadian extractive companies like Pacific Rim for its overseas activities with respect to environmental and human rights.

The second activity was in collaboration with **Amnesty International** on Saturday March 27<sup>th</sup> with the organization of a National Yoga day for Human Rights in El Salvador. People across Canada wrote letters in the shape of maple leaves to support community leaders in Cabañas. Over 300 letters were written in the Ottawa-



Gatineau region. Amnesty International will be collecting the cards until April 30 and then send them to El Salvador. If you wish to participate in this initiative, visit [www.yogaday.ca](http://www.yogaday.ca) to print your letter, sign it and submit it to the Amnesty International office located at 312 Laurier Avenue East, Ottawa.

The third activity of historic importance was the commemoration of Archbishop Oscar Romero on March 27<sup>th</sup> at **Emmanuel United Church of Ottawa**. The church was full of people eager to remember the man who was known as the "voice of the voiceless", and was murdered on March 24<sup>th</sup> 1980 while giving mass. The audience participated in a procession of light and roses in his honour and a banner was presented by the painter **Victor Fuentes** representing the Salvadoran people's struggle to defend their environment using the analogy of David versus Goliath. A joyful feast of Salvadoran food and live music by mariachi **Marcos Alfaro** was enjoyed afterwards. Two historical facts were emphasized at the event: The presidential declaration marking the first ever Oscar Romero National Day and the Government's plea for forgiveness for the assassination of Archbishop Romero.

Last but not least, throughout the week 500 postcards were distributed and the public was asked to sign and send it directly to Pacific Rim' headquarters in Vancouver. The public was also invited to visit the website of **Magazine Vision Latina** ([www.vision-latina.ca](http://www.vision-latina.ca)) and answer the question "Should Pacific Rim withdraw its lawsuit of \$200 million against the government of El Salvador?" At the time of publication 93% answered yes.

**The Coalition against Gold Mining in El Salvador of Ottawa – Gatineau would like to thank** Amanecer Ranchero FM 89.1, Amnesty International, Christian Hispanic Community of Emmanuel United Church, Committee for Human Rights in Latin America (CDHAL), School of Political Studies of the University of Ottawa, Magazine Vision Latina, Mining Watch Canada, FMLN Ottawa-Gatineau, Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), Salvaide, Salvadorian Canadian Association of Ottawa and National Capital Region (ASCORCAN), Salvadorian Women's Committee of Ottawa-Gatineau, Territorio Libre, US-El Salvador Sister Cities, and all of the brave community leaders of San Isidro y Trinidad of Cabañas, El Salvador.

For more details of the Solidarity week with El Salvador in Ottawa-Gatineau or in other North American cities, visit [www.salvaide.ca/PastEvents.html](http://www.salvaide.ca/PastEvents.html)

### **Photos:**

First: Work by painter Victor Fuentes, using the analogy of David versus Goliath, this represents the Salvadoran people's struggle to defend their environment from the gold mining project by Pacific Rim, a Canadian corporation. Second: Maple leaf postcards signed by Canadians in support of the people of El Salvador, Amnesty International's campaign March 2010.

For more information or to organize an interview, you can contact Laura Avalos, President of the Salvadorian Canadian Association of Ottawa and National Capital Region (ASCORCAN)

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