

Canadian owned mining company Minera San Xavier is set to destroy Cerro San Pedro, a Mexican heritage village home to 150

By Mike Boylan

Despite the opposition of the community of Cerro San Pedro (CSP), a local resistance movement Frente Amplio Opositor (FAO), Canadian NGOs (Mining Watch, Mines and Communities, Kairos) and tens of thousands of residents in the nearby San Luis Potosi, a Canadian owned mining company is set to destroy the village of Cerro San Pedro, Mexico.

On a visit to Cerro San Pedro on November 7 and 8, 2006, I witnessed and documented rapid activity of heavy machinery in preparation to begin large scale blasting and both heard and felt explosions coming from the mine site. The mine is clearly progressing with its activities while lacking legal clearance, access rights to land¹ and environmental permits.²



**"I have lived in Cerro San Pedro all of my life, and it doesn't matter how much money MSX offers, this is my home and I'm not leaving."
- Armando Mendoza, standing in front of the damaged church.**

I saw persuasive evidence contradicting this first hand. The new settlement constructed by the mine, optimistically called 'New Cerro San Pedro' is located less than one km from the leaching pad where gold will be extracted from the ore using highly toxic cyanide, and is both downhill and downwind from the pad. The use of cyanide in gold mining is accepted as being damaging to the health of humans and the environment, and is largely unregulated. There is a voluntary set of standards for the use of cyanide in mining, which MSX has notably not adhered to.⁴

MSX states that even though the mine will not have any effect on the residents of Cerro San Pedro, they have two options:

1. Relocate to the area that MSX has dubbed "Nuevo San Pedro."
2. Sell their property to MSX.

Minera San Xavier (MSX) claims that the use of explosives will not harm the community of CSP. I saw recent and serious structural damage to the school and centuries old church which community member Armando Mendoza says occurred recently and was the result of regular blasting from the mine site.

MSX also claims to have the best interests of the local population, environment and economy in mind, stating "Minera San Xavier represents a superb opportunity to raise the quality of life of the residents (...) of Cerro San Pedro"³



Evidence of damage already inflicted on a centuries old church, due to vibrations from explosions.

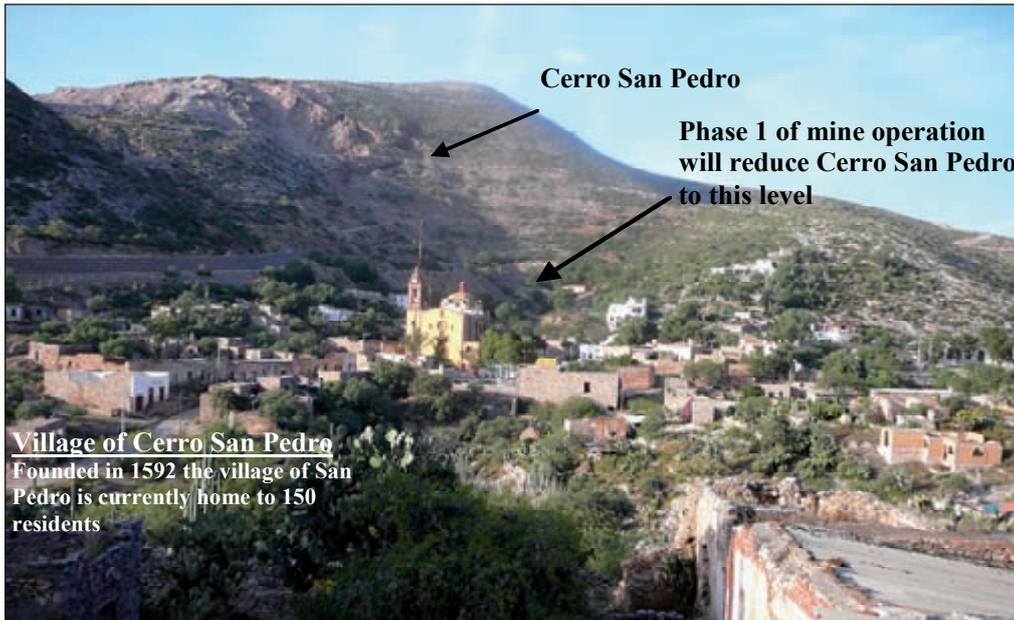
1 Under the Ejido land use system, the land in and around CSP was the property of those who inhabited, or farmed it. Nullified by NAFTA, the land became private property, but still in the hands of the community. All residents of CSP have refused to sell their land to MSX

2 The land-use permit initially awarded to MSX was permanently and irreversibly nullified in 2005 based upon CSP's status as a protected wildlife area, and its sensitive and important aquifers. In April 2006 the government awarded the company a new permit, which defies and violates several laws

3 www.msx.com.mx/minera/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=21&Itemid=76

4 The International Cyanide Management Code <http://www.cyanidecode.org/>

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The photo, left, makes clear both the proximity of the community to the mine site, and the scale of the proposed mine. Phase 1 involves removal of Cerro San Pedro to the indicated level, which is estimated to require 25 tones of high explosive/day. Once completed, phase 2 is the construction of the open pit mine, which upon completion will stretch 1km across and reach 250m of depth.¹

FAO asserts that knowledge of the planned destruction of CSP is not widely known in neighboring San Luis Potosi. When informed and asked of their opinion in a recent poll conducted by the group, of 20 000 participants, consistently over 97% responded that they were opposed to the mine.² Unfortunately they were never consulted and their representative, the state governor, has been silent in his role of enforcing local laws and permit requirements.

What is at stake:

- 414 year old town, which is one signature away from becoming a UNESCO world heritage site, will be destroyed. Currently a growing tourist destination, this sustainable source of livelihood will be destroyed. Alternatively the mine is slated to operate for 8 years.
- The gold mine will require 3 million ltrs of water/day³, in an area where the aquifer which feeds a city of 1.5 million is dropping. 18% of residents in San Luis Potosi don't have access to water.
- 1000 people within 3 kms of the mine site have been offered no compensation. There is evidence of children in this proximity to other gold mines, having elevated levels of cyanide and lead in their blood.
- The estimated 50 local people employed at the mine, in the lowest paying positions, will also be the most vulnerable to exposure to cyanide and other toxic chemicals.
- The Cyanide leaching pad is elevated above the surrounding communities, and should it leak, or rupture (as has happened at many gold mines in the past) the toxic tailings would flow directly toward these residents.
- The Cyanide leaching pad is located in a major watershed which feeds the aquifer, which in turn supplies San Luis Potosi with much of its water
- The reputation of the Canadian government and people as exploiters of foreign communities
- The precedent that multinationals can ignore and override the law in the name of profit
- The resulting pile of mine tailings, finely crushed rock, will pollute the air with dust and clog rivers and irrigation with sediment for decades.

Most of the information in this article came from personal observation and interviews with the hard working members of Frente Amplio Opositor, including: Ana Maria Alvarado Garcia, Mario Martinez, Carlos Covarrubias.

For more information, or to become involved, their website is: www.angelfire.com/rebellion2/antimxs/.

1 <http://www.angelfire.com/rebellion2/antimxs/proyecto.htm>

2 Survey included almost 20 000 participants and was conducted on Oct 22-23, 2006. Results are available here: http://www.miningwatch.ca/index.php?metallica/slp_referendum

3 http://www.msx.com.mx/minera/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=53&Itemid=85