

BACKGROUNDER

Canada's mining industry abroad: Human rights harms and the fight for accountability

IACHR thematic hearing | Panama City, Panama | October 27, 2026

Backgrounder produced by MiningWatch Canada, in collaboration with the Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability, Justice and Corporate Accountability Project, Americas Policy Group, and Earthworks.

THE ISSUE

On October 27, 2026, representatives from six countries in Latin America and the Caribbean will testify before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in a hearing on Canada's failure to prevent, regulate, monitor, and remedy human rights and environmental harms linked to Canadian mining companies operating abroad.

The IACHR is a principal human rights body of the Organization of American States (OAS). It monitors human rights conditions, develops regional standards, and addresses concerns raised by States, civil society, and affected communities. The thematic hearing is part of the IACHR's [197th Period of Sessions](#) in Panama City.

Witnesses from Mexico, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Ecuador, and Argentina will testify to a systemic pattern of harms they have experienced in connection with mining projects owned by Canadian companies, including water contamination, threats to health and livelihoods, violations of Indigenous Peoples' rights, inadequate consultation, reprisals against environmental defenders, and barriers to justice and remedy. Environmental organizations and legal experts will testify on how Canada's active support for the industry, combined with limited oversight and regulation, enables harm and contravenes Canada's international human rights obligations.

WHY THIS HEARING MATTERS NOW

Canada is a global mining power. Approximately half of the world's publicly listed mining companies are based in Canada. The Canadian government actively supports their operations abroad through public pension investments, financing and loans from [Export Development Canada \(EDC\)](#), trade commissioner services at Canadian embassies, and dozens of [trade](#) and [investment agreements](#) that [protect corporate interests](#). Canadian companies are deeply involved in the exploration, financing, development, and operation of hundreds of projects in Latin America and the Caribbean, often on [Indigenous territories](#), in [rural communities](#), and in [environmentally sensitive areas](#).

A global mining rush is intensifying the risks. Demand for metals and minerals for [economic growth](#), [national security and defence](#), [digital technologies](#), [energy transition](#), and related infrastructure is driving new mining investment. Without effective oversight and access to

justice, the [accelerated expansion of Canadian mining projects](#) across the hemisphere risks deepening existing harms while making it harder for affected communities to defend their rights.

Documented harm is worsening. People affected by Canadian mining projects struggle for [access to environmental information](#) and to influence decisions that affect their rights, obtain remedy, and secure independent investigations into [alleged abuses](#). For decades, communities have called on [Canada to address these harms](#), while UN human rights bodies have [repeatedly raised concerns](#) about gaps in Canada's laws and policies governing the overseas activities of Canadian companies. Earlier this year, Canada announced the elimination of the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise (CORE), further narrowing the already inadequate avenues available to communities seeking accountability.

International standards establish State responsibilities. The IACHR and its Special Rapporteurship on Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights (REDESCA) recognize that States must do more than avoid enabling human rights violations. They must properly regulate private actors, prevent business-related abuses, remove barriers to justice, and ensure access to effective remedies. This hearing will examine what those obligations mean for Canada as the home State of mining companies operating across the Americas.

CALLS ON THE COMMISSION

Canada continues to emphasize voluntary standards and dialogue rather than enforceable prevention and accountability measures. Recent Canadian legislative debates on corporate responsibility have largely focused on forced labour in supply chains, and have failed to attend to other human rights and environmental harms linked to Canadian companies abroad. Witnesses will testify on how gaps in Canadian law, policy, oversight, and accountability allow these harms to continue. The witnesses are calling on the Commission to urge Canada to:

- **Adopt mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence legislation** applicable to Canadian corporations operating abroad.
- **Strengthen independent accountability mechanisms** and improve access to remedies for affected communities.
- **Condition public financing, export credit, investment support, insurance, and other government assistance** on robust human rights and environmental safeguards.
- **Improve transparency and public reporting** on human rights and environmental risks associated with overseas extractive operations.

Witnesses also call on the IACHR and REDESCA to monitor the impacts of Canadian extractive companies, investigate recurring regional patterns through thematic reporting, and maintain engagement with affected communities and environmental defenders.

WITNESSES

The hearing is being supported by the International Human Rights Clinic at Santa Clara University School of Law, the International Human Rights Clinic at the University of Illinois

Chicago School of Law, the Canadian Network for Corporate Accountability, Earthworks, and MiningWatch Canada. The following representatives from mining-affected communities, legal experts, and civil society organizations will testify.

Dr. Charis Kamphuis and Leah Gardner, Justice and Corporate Accountability Project (CANADA) | *Canada's diplomatic, political, and financial support for mining companies, lack of accountability mechanisms*

The Justice and Corporate Accountability Project (JCAP) has produced and contributed to dozens of reports and academic papers documenting Canada's failure to address harm tied to Canadian mining companies, including damage to the environment, lack of consent and inadequate consultation, criminalization, corruption, and violence against human rights defenders. Charis will testify that Canada's laws and state practices provide the political, legal, and economic support that enables the overseas operations of Canadian mining companies. Despite nearly three decades of knowledge of risks and harms tied to many of these operations, Canada continues to fail to meet its international obligations to prevent, investigate, sanction, and remedy related human rights violations.

There is no mandatory due diligence legislation in Canada, no effective mechanism to investigate companies, no effective mechanism for holding Canadian officials accountable for failures to uphold their own policies, and the obstacles to accessing Canadian courts are nearly insurmountable. Serious and widespread allegations of human rights violations persist as a result.

José Luis Abarca (MEXICO) | *Murder of an environmental defender, Canadian embassy support for mining, failed accountability mechanisms in Canada*

José Luis Abarca Montejo is the son of Mariano Abarca Roblero, an environmental defender murdered on November 27, 2009, in Chicomuselo, Chiapas, Mexico. José Luis will testify about Canadian company Blackfire Exploration, which obtained a permit to mine barite in his hometown in 2006 without adequate consultation. By early 2009, mining activity had contaminated the nearby Yayahuita River with oil and gas residues and damaged homes along truck routes. In June, Mariano and other residents brought their concerns directly to the Canadian Embassy. Documents obtained through access-to-information requests show that, despite knowing about widespread community opposition to the project and serious threats to the safety of environmental defenders, embassy officials continued lobbying Chiapas authorities to advance the project. Soon after, Mariano was murdered.

His family filed complaints in Canada seeking an investigation into whether embassy actions and omissions may have put Mariano at greater risk. The Public Sector Integrity Commissioner declined to investigate, a decision upheld on judicial review. Nearly 17 years later, his murder remains unpunished. His family has filed a separate complaint against Canada before the

IACHR for Canada's use of economic diplomacy to advance mining interests at the expense of defenders.

Identity withheld (PANAMA) | *Mining impacts on Indigenous rights, freedom of movement, and access to healthcare*

First Quantum Minerals owns a mining concession on lands used by the Ngäbe-Buglé for many years for hunting and gathering purposes. Approximately 30 years ago, the Ngäbe-Buglé established permanent communities in the area. Despite widespread opposition to mining and without a legal lease, First Quantum Minerals built and began operating within this concession an open-pit copper mine in 2019. In the years since, communities have raised significant concerns about the mine's impact on water and agriculture in the area. Communities living within the mining concession have to rely on a company-built and managed road for access in and out of their communities. Identification cards are issued by the company, which also controls a security checkpoint to manage who is allowed in and out of the community – impeding freedom of movement and restricting access to urgent healthcare. This witness is testifying anonymously due to safety concerns amidst an increase in threats, targeted attacks, and surveillance.

Marco Manobanda (ECUADOR) | *Lack of consultation, use of state security forces to advance mining operations, criminalization of environmental defenders*

Marco Manobanda is an Indigenous farmer from the community of La Unión in the Las Naves canton of Ecuador, where he runs a small ecotourism and fish farming business. Marco will testify to how, since 2006, his community has been affected by the Curipamba–El Domo mine, owned by Canadian companies Silvercorp Metals and Salazar Resources. Without adequate consultation, the open-pit and underground mine is being built in the headwaters that sustain local communities, already causing deforestation and water contamination. In June 2025, more than 300 police and military personnel used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse a peaceful protest, injuring several people and clearing the way for mining equipment to pass through. Residents now face a continuing military presence, threats, harassment, and raids. More than 30 people have faced criminal charges, with many sentenced to years in prison despite a lack of evidence. Multiple UN Special Rapporteurs have already denounced the situation, but Canada has taken no action.

Mayerly López (COLOMBIA) | *Protection of biodiverse watersheds, threats to environmental defenders, failed efforts to obtain protection through Colombian and Canadian authorities*

Canadian mining company Aris Mining is exploring in Colombia's Santurbán páramo, a watershed vital for climate regulation and one that supplies water to more than two million people. After the Colombian government revoked environmental protections in August and

September 2026, Aris told investors the decision had cleared the way for its Soto Norte project and announced plans to pursue environmental licensing. Mayerly will testify to the risks this poses.

After 17 years of community resistance, threats escalated in 2024 against Mayerly and others organizing to protect the Santurbán páramo from large-scale mining. Their faces appeared on pamphlets declaring them *persona non grata* and linking them to armed groups and illegal activities, widely circulated in town and on social media. In a country facing some of the world's highest murder rates for environmental defenders, these threats are very serious. Despite appeals for protection, and concerns raised by four UN bodies asking Canada about its human rights due diligence and access to remedy, Canadian authorities have taken no action.

Casilda Lima (DOMINICAN REPUBLIC) | *Water contamination, health impacts, and losses to agriculture, risks posed by tailings dams, demands for relocation to a safe and healthy environment*

The Pueblo Viejo mine in the Dominican Republic is one of the largest gold-mining operations in the world, owned by Canadian mining giant Barrick Mining in a joint venture with Newmont. Community organizations and environmental advocates have raised longstanding concerns regarding contamination affecting water resources, agricultural production, livestock, and public health. Residents receive bottled water from the Dominican government weekly, and report it is an alternative source of drinking water because of concerns regarding water quality and contamination associated with mining activities.

Casilda Lima lives with her children and grandchildren less than one kilometre from the tailings dam at Pueblo Viejo. She will testify to how, following the construction of the tailings dam, members of her community have suffered respiratory illnesses, vision loss, kidney problems, and other health issues. She is regularly exposed to excessive dust and noise from mining operations, with limited access to water, and is gravely concerned about the risks of a tailings collapse. She joins others in urging the company to fulfill affected communities' longstanding demand for relocation to a safe and healthy environment.

Saúl Zeballos (ARGENTINA) | *Repeated mining spills and contamination of rivers, failures in disclosure and independent water monitoring, lack of accountability*

Barrick Mining owns the Veladero gold mine in the province of San Juan, Argentina. Saúl will testify to how, in September 2015, the Veladero mine spilled millions of litres of solution contaminated with cyanide and other toxic substances into the Jáchal River watershed, which sustains agriculture, livestock farming, and the livelihoods of thousands of families. The company and local authorities failed to alert the public in a timely manner, leaving communities to find out about the spill only after a mineworker shared information through informal channels.

Information about other spills have subsequently been shared the same informal way, leading local organizations to conduct their own water monitoring and tests.

Canadian officials have been aware of community concerns since at least 2016, but have failed to take meaningful action to hold the company accountable. Since then, several other spills and environmental disturbances have been documented, including one in 2025 which resulted in the death of thousands of fish allegedly exposed to heavy metals and free chlorine associated with mining activities. The Veladero mine continues to operate, in violation of Argentina's environmental laws.

Arturo Ezquerro-Cañete, MiningWatch Canada (CANADA) | *Pattern of mining-related harms by Canadian companies, failure of Canada to legislate accountability*

Arturo will testify to MiningWatch's longstanding accompaniment of communities in Latin America and the Caribbean affected by Canadian mining operations. Over the years, a pattern of violence and environmental harm has emerged, reflecting a systemic failure on the part of the Canadian government to prevent human rights violations and guarantee access to justice. In each of these situations, communities have repeatedly reported their concerns to Canadian authorities, who have chosen not to act. Instead, Canada continues to rely on voluntary standards to regulate corporate behaviour – an approach that is failing to rein in human rights abuse and violates Canada's international obligations. On behalf of MiningWatch Canada, Arturo is urging the Commission to call on Canada to close this enormous accountability gap: adopt binding human rights and environmental due diligence legislation and suspend diplomatic and financial support for Canadian mining companies credibly alleged to be abusing rights.