

WE REJECT THE USE OF MILITARIZATION IN THE PARISH OF PALO QUEMADO, ECUADOR, TO ADVANCE CANADIAN MINING PROJECT.

Open letter to Atico Mining Corporation, President of Ecuador and Canadian government

We, the undersigned Ecuadorian, Canadian and international civil society organizations, wish to express our deep concern for the militarization, criminalization and intimidation of the *campesino*, Montubio, and Indigenous communities of Palo Quemado (Sigchos, Cotopaxi), affected by the Canadian mining company Atico Mining and its La Plata project, as a result of their defense of water and life.

Atico Mining is attempting to advance the “La Plata” mining project (gold, copper, zinc and silver) in the northeastern Ecuadorian province of Cotopaxi. A significant portion of the local affected communities of Palo Quemado and neighbouring Las Pampas have firmly opposed mining for at least the past 40 years on the grounds that mining activities have already resulted in the contamination of their watersheds and soil. They are concerned that new mining activities will threaten the integrity of surrounding ecosystems, the quality of air and water, and harm the social fabric of their communities. They fear that their livelihoods raising cattle and growing sugar cane (panela) for export to Europe will be negatively affected.

On October 28, 2024, the parish of Palo Quemado was militarized, by decision of President Daniel Noboa, in order to [conclude an environmental consultation process](#) that will allow the La Plata mining project – owned by Canadian mining company Atico Mining – to advance to the exploitation stage.

However, this is not the first time that state security forces have been used in support of Atico Mining to intimidate the communities of Palo Quemado.

La Plata is one of two test sites for Ecuador’s controversial new process for environmental consultation – a process that, [by design](#), fails to ensure that all communities at risk are properly informed and consulted. It does not afford communities the right to veto development projects on their lands and has been loudly rejected for being unconstitutional. After a first failed attempt in [2023](#), the national government resumed a consultation in March 2024 in the community of Palo Quemado. In response to peaceful protest, there was [significant military and police repression](#), leaving [at least 15 injured](#), one person in a coma, and over 70 environmental defenders charged with terrorism, organized crime and criminal conspiracy in an effort to criminalize their legitimate right to protest. Although the consultation was suspended in March, the courts have [backtracked](#) on that decision. Since then, fears are high there will be

renewed efforts to carry out the consultation and, along with it, bring renewed state violence. The widespread military presence in Palo Quemado between October 27-28 proves these fears are well-founded and represents a looming threat to the territory.

In addition to criminalization, the environmental defenders of Palo Quemado and Las Pampas have also suffered acts of harassment and intimidation, including an onslaught of harassment on social media [in response to their work](#) leading awareness campaigns for the care of the land and water in light of the threats posed by the La Plata project. The Canadian company has been accused of implementing a surveillance and monitoring strategy by installing cameras near the town centre under the pretext of added security, creating an atmosphere of fear and tension in the communities.

Several United Nations agencies, such as the [United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) Volker Türk and the UN [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders](#) Mary Lawlor, as well as international human rights organizations such as [Amnesty International](#), have all denounced this environmental consultation process and the violence under which it has been carried out.

High Commissioner Türk stated at the time: “People directly affected by mining projects or activities must be heard, not repressed.”

Canada has failed to speak out in support of rights defenders and affected communities and has failed to denounce the violence carried out against them; on the contrary, Canada has [questioned](#) the reporting by UN bodies.

The use of state security forces to repress local opposition to mining is a growing trend in Ecuador. According to an agreement between the Ministries of Non-Renewable Resources and National Defense of Ecuador, 14 mining projects have been designated as “Security Zones” (Áreas Reservadas de Seguridad), including La Plata and five other Canadian mining projects. The free trade agreement currently being negotiated between Canada and Ecuador aims to increase mining investment in the country and afford mining companies even greater privileges. This trade deal will only increase this repression and spark further socio-environmental conflict.

The Ecuadorian population, and especially the communities affected by Canadian mining projects, are not being informed about the progress of negotiations. Nor has Ecuador made an assessment of the human rights and environmental impacts of the proposed trade deal. As expressed by [four Indigenous, campesina, and environmental defenders from Ecuador on a delegation to Canada](#) and more than [100](#) Ecuadorian civil society [organizations](#), a free trade agreement between the two countries will lead to even more devastation in the territories and violation of human rights and nature.

We, civil society organizations and representatives of social movements, support this letter and reject the militarization, intimidation, and criminalization of environmental defenders in Palo Quemado. We stand in solidarity with them. **We call on Atico Mining and the Ecuadorian and Canadian governments to:**

To Atico Mining:

- **Cease the criminalization and intimidation of** affected communities, including Montubio, campesino, Indigenous, and riverside communities in Palo Quemado who defend water, community rights, and nature.
- **Cease its operations and withdraw from Palo Quemado.**

To the Ecuadorian executive branch:

- **Cancel** the environmental consultation process for the La Plata mining concession.
- **Cancel** the agreement between the Ministries of Non-Renewable Resources and National Defense for the establishment of “Security Zones” (Áreas Reservadas de Seguridad) around 14 mining projects, including La Plata.
- **Cease trade** negotiations with Canada.

To the Canadian Embassy in Ecuador:

- **Implement** the [“Voices at Risk: Canada's Guidelines on Supporting Human Rights Defenders”](#) and **publicly denounce the intimidation and criminalization** of communities by Canadian company Atico Mining.
- **Withdraw** all trade, diplomatic, political, and economic support to Atico Mining.
- In accordance with Canada's feminist foreign policy, we urge you to **issue** a formal public statement on social media in support of all women environmental defenders who are being attacked for defending territory and life.

To Canadian Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Mary NG:

- **Cease** trade negotiations with Ecuador.

SIGNED:

Ecuador:

1. Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE)
2. Frente antiminerero Pacto por la Vida el Agua y La Naturaleza
3. Observatorio nacional ciudadano para vigilar el cumplimiento de los derechos humanos y derechos de la naturaleza, en referencia a los procesos mineros en todas sus fases

4. Asociación de propietarios de tierras rurales del Norte - APT Norte
5. Alianza de Organizaciones por los Derechos Humanos del Ecuador
6. Consejo Defensorial de la provincia de Santa Elena
7. Colectivo Jóvenes por Salcedo
8. Congregación de hermanas de la Providencia
9. Colectivo Cuidemos el Noroccidente de Pichincha
10. Extinction Rebellion Ecuador
11. Extinction Rebellion Guayaquil
12. Congregación Santa Mariana de Jesús
13. Misioneras Dominicanas del Rosario
14. Instituto de Estudios Ecologistas
15. Oficina de Derechos de la Naturaleza
16. Observatorio de los derechos humanos y los de la naturaleza -Pacayacu
17. Grupo Ecológico Chukidel
18. COLECTIVO MUJERES DE ASFALTO
19. Colectiva de Antropólogas del Ecuador
20. Mujeres Luna Creciente
21. UDAPT- Unión de Afectados por texaco
22. Rebelión Científica Ecuador
23. Batambá
24. Colectivo por derechos humanos- PRODH
25. Observatorio de Violencia de Género contra las Mujeres y demás identidades sexo-genéricas, en Manabí (OVIGEMA)
26. Agencia Tegantai de noticias ecologistas
27. Colectivo Teatral ARTOS
28. Esclavas del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús
29. Mujeres Por el Cambio
30. Comité de promejoras
31. Convención de Ciencias Políticas y Relaciones Internacionales del Ecuador
32. Centro de Documentación en Derechos Humanos "Segundo Montes Mozo SJ" (CSMM)
33. Pachayachachik Casa de Memorias.
34. Flacso Ecuador
35. Colectivo "Bonaerenses Unidos Protectores del Ecosistema (BUPROE)
36. Movimiento de economía social y solidaria del Ecuador
37. Organización de mujeres Indígenas y Campesina Sembrando Esperanza
38. Mujeres Luna Creciente
39. Organización Comuna Amazónica
40. Fundación Savia Roja
41. Escuela de agroecología de Leg Tabacay

42. Escuela de agroecología Virgen de la Merced
43. Escuela de agroecología y Biosalud San Marcos
44. Escuela de agroecología de Hermano Miguel
45. Escuela de agroecología de Mujeres de Bulan
46. Escuela de agroecología de Mujeres Kimsakocha
47. Escuela de agroecología de la Libertad
48. Escuela de agroecología de Guayara
49. Escuela de agroecología Medicina Ancestral y Liderazgo de San Lucas
50. Escuela de agroecología Sumak Kawsay
51. Escuela de agroecología de Tenta, Escuela de Agroecología Sisa Wayra
52. Escuela de agroecología de Mujeres de la Corpukis - Asomupkisa.
53. Cabildo por las Mujeres de Cuenca
54. Yasunidos Guapondelig
55. Bordadoras Autoconvocadas por la Resistencia
56. Fundación Econexion
57. Centro de Apoyo y Protección de los Derechos Humanos SURKUNA, Ecuador
58. Mujeres de Frente
59. Acción Ecológica
60. Mingas por el Mar
61. OMASNE (Observatorio de conflictos Mineros, Ambientales y Sociales del Norte del Ecuador)
62. Laboratorio Coreográfico
63. Union de Organizaciones Campesinas de Esmeraldas UOCE.
64. Cuencanos unidos por los incendios
65. Allullas Verdes

Canada

66. MiningWatch Canada
67. Grandmothers Advocacy Network
68. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA)
69. Le Comité pour les droits humains en Amérique latine (CDHAL)
70. Mining Injustice Solidarity Network (MISN)
71. Community Peacemaker Teams- Colombia Program
72. Codevelopment Canada
73. Common Frontiers
74. Friends of the Earth Canada
75. Mining Justice Alliance (MJA)
76. Alternatives International
77. Inter Pares

Latin America, United States and Europe

78. Marcha Carnaval por la Vida - Medellín - Colombia
79. Espacio Encuentro de Mujeres - Panamá
80. Coordinadora para la defensa de tierras y aguas de Coclé (C.O.D.T.A.C) - Panamá
81. Fundación Cerro Verde - Perú
82. Trenzando Feminismos- Guatemala
83. Red continental Cristiana por la paz - Honduras
84. Associação Unidos em Defesa de Covas do Barroso - Brasil
85. Grupo de Danza y Teatro Campobello IASP -México
86. Tierra Nativa A.C -México
87. Fundación para el Desarrollo Integral, Comunitario y Conservación de Ecosistemas en Panamá (FUNDICCEP) - Panamá
88. Chile Mejor sin TLC - Chile
89. Confederación Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Trabajadores Estatales
90. Red Mexicana de Acción frente al Libre Comercio -RMALC (Mexico)
91. Yes to Llife no to Mining
92. WITNESS
93. Coal Action Network
94. Earth Thrive
95. Aid Watch
96. Rainforest Action Group
97. People's Health Movement
98. CATAPA
99. Salva la Selva, España
100. Rettet den Regenwald, Alemania
101. Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment - Filipinas
102. Amazon Watch
103. People's Health Movement
104. Earthworks
105. London Mining Network
106. Amazon Frontlines
107. Igapo Project
108. Stand Earth