

**The rivers are**  
**bleeding**  
**British mining in Latin America**



*Escondida: the biggest copper mine in the world (Chile).*

Nataliya Hora

**The vast expansion of mega-mining projects in Latin America is displacing indigenous communities, destroying local ecosystems, and costing lives and livelihoods. In our ground-breaking new report, War on Want exposes the devastating impact of British mining in Latin America, gathering 17 case studies from across the continent to produce a damning indictment of one of the world's most powerful industries.**

**‘Because of the coal dust, Moisés gets this dry cough. He needs clean air in his lungs. That’s why it is hard for him to breathe, he breathes contaminated air twenty-four hours a day... Last year, a girl of just eight months died because of the coal dust that caked her lungs.’**

**Luz Ángela Uriana Epiayu, La Guajira, Colombia**

In Latin America, mineral resources and fossil fuels have attracted huge foreign investment. But their extraction has also left a trail of environmental degradation, labour exploitation and human rights violations, as well as triggering contests over water and territory with land grabs, either forcible or negotiated through corruption and fraud. This in

turn has fuelled over 250 social and armed conflicts in the region, while those land, water and human rights defenders who resist, risk being criminalised, attacked and murdered.

Mining operations currently account for 253 separate conflicts in Latin America, with social conflicts breaking out wherever there are major foreign investments in mega-mining projects.<sup>1</sup> Although the devastating consequences for local communities and ecosystems have been well documented, challenging mega-mining projects remains so difficult – and so dangerous – because extractivism is a central part of the logic of globalisation. Despite this, community resistance to industrial mining is growing and strengthening as important advances are made to limit, question and stop this extractive activity where it is most destructive.





Maria Camila Mendez from Cajamarca, Colombia challenging the Corporate Mines and Money Conference in London.

## What is extractivism?

Extractivism is a highly destructive model of economic development based on the extraction of finite natural resources such as metals, minerals, fossil fuels, land and water. It relies on the exploitation and displacement of local communities, mainly in the global South, to produce raw materials for production and profit, mostly by corporations in the global North. While extractivism is presented as the only road to 'economic development', in practice it serves as a means to plunder the global South, contributing to climate change, inequality and human rights violations.

## London's license to plunder

*The Rivers Are Bleeding: British Mining in Latin America* focuses on some of the most powerful culprits – Anglo American, BHP Billiton and Glencore – providing a snapshot of just 17 of the most destructive and contested mega-mining projects. But that's just the tip of the iceberg.

Both host states, where operations take place, and home states where these corporations are licensed, share responsibility for the human rights and environmental abuses committed by these companies.

The heart of the global mining industry beats in the City of London, where most of the biggest mining companies are incorporated. Though licensed in the UK, they are not held accountable by the UK government and instead enjoy its unconditional political and financial support.

Mostly ignored by the mainstream media, they evade public as well as parliamentary scrutiny, committing human rights and environmental violations with impunity. The consequence is the unchecked growth of an industry that is devastating to the environment, deadly for communities and posing a clear and present danger to democracy and self-determination.

## **SAMARCO, Brazil (BHP Billiton)**

**‘We have seen whole communities destroyed by BHP Billiton and Vale’s operations. They have lost everything... Instead of reparations for the victims, what is becoming evident is the blatant corporate capture of our government by transnational companies.’**

**Rodrigo de Castro Amédée Péret, Churches and Mining Network in Latin America<sup>2</sup>**

The Samarco iron ore mine is jointly operated by BHP Billiton and Brazilian company Vale, located in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. Brazil’s worst ever environmental disaster occurred in 2015 when the Fundão tailings dam at the Samarco mine collapsed. The collapse killed 20 people<sup>3</sup> and left 700 homeless. It also generated a tidal wave of mud that destroyed the village of Bento Rodrigues and spewed 50 million cubic metres of mineral waste into the Rio Doce over 650 km into the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>4</sup> The pollution killed fish and aquatic life along the length of the river and polluted vast swathes of agricultural land.

The companies’ compensation plan falls billions of dollars short of the damage done and has also been criticised for failing once again to respect the right

of affected communities to participate in shaping the process.<sup>5</sup> The most serious allegation is that the companies could have acted to prevent the dam’s collapse.

In June 2016, a Brazilian federal police investigation concluded the company ignored clear signs that the dam was at risk of failing.<sup>6</sup> In October 2016 the Brazilian prosecutor’s office charged 21 people for ‘qualified homicide’, including BHP Billiton board members. BHP Billiton is disputing the charges.

## **TINTAYA, Peru (Glencore)**

Members of the local community have brought a legal case in the UK seeking compensation for human rights violations allegedly perpetrated by the Peruvian National Police (PNP) during a protest involving human rights activists, students, mineworkers and farmers in the vicinity of the Tintaya mine in May 2012. Two protestors were killed and a number were severely injured and detained by the PNP during the protest, and footage appears to show the PNP shooting protesters at close range.

At the time, the mine was owned by Xstrata Tintaya S.A. (renamed Compañía Minera Antapaccay S.A.), a subsidiary of Xstrata PLC, which merged with Glencore International PLC in 2013. The claimants, supported by London legal firm, Leigh Day, allege that the PNP used excessive force, firing live ammunition, beating protesters, forcing them to hold stress



*Following the Samarco dam collapse, a man tries to reach his home a few weeks after the tidal wave of mud had dried up.*

positions in the cold for hours and subjecting them to racial abuse.<sup>7</sup> One of the claimants, Mr Yohel Colque, was hospitalised for 16 months after being shot in the head and is now unable to walk and is confined to a wheelchair.<sup>8</sup>

Claimants argue that Xstrata ought to have anticipated PNP's conduct, given its poor human rights record. The allegations are strenuously denied by Xstrata/Glencore, which claims that the PNP operated independently of it and that the company cannot be held liable. However, the claimants contend that documents show Xstrata controlled an intelligence-gathering network which was shared with the PNP and paid PNP intelligence officers to conduct surveillance of community members.<sup>9</sup>

## **CERREJÓN, Colombia (BHP Billiton, Anglo & Glencore)**

Cerrejón, the biggest open cast coal mine in Colombia and one of the largest in the world, is owned in three equal shares by Anglo American, BHP Billiton and Glencore.<sup>10</sup> The mine is located in La Guajira region on the northern tip of Colombia,

a remote and impoverished area populated by around 400,000 Wayúu indigenous and Afro-descendant people who mainly live below the poverty line and who struggle to survive in harsh surroundings, made more brutal by regular drought.

To date, twenty-five African-descendant and indigenous communities have been forcibly displaced. Resettlements of local communities have led to loss of land for agriculture and difficulties sustaining livelihoods.

The lives of those left behind are marred by the mine. Nearby rivers and streams have been diverted or polluted by mining operations, threatening local access to clean water. The damming of the Rancheria river enables Cerrejón to use 17 million litres of water a day while each resident of La Guajira is left with an average of 0.7 litres per day to live on.<sup>11</sup>

In 40 years, there has never been an independent investigation into the health impacts that it is having on local people,<sup>12</sup> but locals report a surge in skin conditions, stomach problems, eye disorders and respiratory problems.<sup>13</sup>



*The Cerrejón open-cast coal mine, Colombia.*



The Movement of People Affected by Dams protests one year after the Samarco disaster.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Corporations must:** report the occurrence of human rights and environmental violations; respect the process of consultation and the right of communities to say no, with special emphasis on marginalised groups such as women, children and indigenous peoples; provide fair reparations for damages.
- 2. The UK government must:** urgently conduct an independent inquiry into the human rights and environmental impacts of UK-listed mining companies in Latin America; hold corporations to account; and facilitate fair access to justice for affected communities.
- 3. Host countries must:** meet their obligations under international human rights law by protecting the rights of affected communities, including the right to be properly informed and consulted on the impact of mining projects and introduce a zero-tolerance policy against threats, criminalisation and killing of activists by state forces or private military contractors.
- 4. Civil society and the media must:** work together to investigate more UK-listed mines operating abroad; highlight the devastating local and global impacts of these operations and help amplify the voices of affected communities.



**War on Want's report, *The Rivers are Bleeding: British Mining in Latin America*, is due for release on Friday 19th October 2018 as part of the Beyond BHP week of action<sup>14</sup>. To request an advanced copy, email [media@waronwant.org](mailto:media@waronwant.org)**

- 1** Total mining conflicts in Latin America, not just those linked to UK companies. 2018. [https://mapa.conflictosmineros.net/ocmal\\_db-v2/](https://mapa.conflictosmineros.net/ocmal_db-v2/)
- 2** 'One year on, BHP Billiton held to account for the Samarco tailings dam disaster', 16 November 2016, <http://londonminingnetwork.org/2016/11/one-year-on-BHP-Billiton-billiton-held-to-account-for-the-samarco-tailings-dam-disaster/>
- 3** Most media reports say 19 people died but the community insists that the number was 20, because a pregnant woman lost her baby in a miscarriage after being thrown around inside her house by the mud released from the dam. 'One year on, BHP Billiton held to account for the Samarco tailings dam disaster', 16 November 2016, <http://londonminingnetwork.org/2016/11/one-year-on-BHP-Billiton-billiton-held-to-account-for-the-samarco-tailings-dam-disaster/>
- 4** 'Brazil court suspends lawsuit over Samarco mine disaster – Vale', 17 March 2017, <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/brazil-court-suspends-lawsuit-over-003536158.html>; 'IUCN, Renova Foundation and Brazil's mining catastrophe', 12 April 2017, <http://www.minesandcommunities.org/article.php?a=13615>
- 5** 'Brazil: Civil Society Repudiates Samarco Deal', 20 March 2016, <http://www.minesandcommunities.org/article.php?a=13304>
- 6** 'BHP Billiton AGM met by global calls for justice and accountability', 25 October 2016, <http://www.minesandcommunities.org/article.php?a=13541>; See also: Police investigation finds BHP Billiton-Vale Brazilian venture at fault for dam collapse, 10 June 2016, <http://www.mining.com/police-investigation-finds-BHP-Billiton-vale-brazilian-venture-at-fault-for-dam-collapse/>; See also: 'Samarco dam failure in Brazil "caused by design flaws"', 30 August 2016 <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-37218145>. 'The deadly collapse of a dam at the Samarco mine in Brazil was due to design flaws, according to a report...The technical report, commissioned by Samarco's joint owners BHP Billiton and Vale, did not assign blame for the disaster...The report said that a change in the Fundao dam's design between 2011 and 2012 led to less efficient water drainage, and ultimately to the dam's collapse in November 2015'.
- 7** 'Indigenous Peruvians' human rights claim: UK High Court rules on dispute over disclosure of documents by mining giant Xstrata', 21 July 2016, <https://www.leighday.co.uk/News/News-2016/July-2016/UK-High-Court-rules-on-Xstrata-dispute-over-disclosure>
- 8** 'Indigenous Peruvians' human rights claim: UK High Court rules on dispute over disclosure of documents by mining giant Xstrata', 21 July 2016, <https://www.leighday.co.uk/News/News-2016/July-2016/UK-High-Court-rules-on-Xstrata-dispute-over-disclosure>; 'Hearing in London High Court in claim by Peruvians against mining firm', 24 February 2016, <https://www.leighday.co.uk/News/News-2016/February-2016/Hearing-in-London-High-Court-in-claim-by-Peruvians>
- 9** 'Indigenous Peruvians' human rights claim: UK High Court rules on dispute over disclosure of documents by mining giant Xstrata', 21 July 2016, <https://www.leighday.co.uk/News/News-2016/July-2016/UK-High-Court-rules-on-Xstrata-dispute-over-disclosure>
- 10** Forum Syd, *As Black as Coal: Business and human rights with focus on coal mining in Colombia*, Forum Syd, 2016, p.10, [http://www.forumsyd.org/PageFiles/7127/KoL\\_rapport\\_FS\\_web.pdf](http://www.forumsyd.org/PageFiles/7127/KoL_rapport_FS_web.pdf); 'Our company', <http://www.cerrejon.com/site/english/our-company.aspx>
- 11** 'Colombia's Largest Indigenous Group Is Dying With Media Complicity', 3 August 2016, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/colombias-largest-indigenous-group-is-dying-with-media\\_us\\_57a102c1e4b07066ba1fd64](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/colombias-largest-indigenous-group-is-dying-with-media_us_57a102c1e4b07066ba1fd64)
- 12** 'RWE npower: Colombian coal is killing our children! Close Aberthaw!', 16 February 2017, [http://www.theecologist.org/blogs\\_and\\_comments/commentators/2988655/rwe\\_npower\\_colombian\\_coal\\_is\\_killing\\_our\\_children\\_close\\_aberthaw.html](http://www.theecologist.org/blogs_and_comments/commentators/2988655/rwe_npower_colombian_coal_is_killing_our_children_close_aberthaw.html)
- 13** Forum Syd, *As Black as Coal: Business and human rights with focus on coal mining in Colombia*, Forum Syd, 2016, p.12, [http://www.forumsyd.org/PageFiles/7127/KoL\\_rapport\\_FS\\_web.pdf](http://www.forumsyd.org/PageFiles/7127/KoL_rapport_FS_web.pdf)
- 14** Beyond BHP: Breaking free from the world's biggest mining giant event listing: <https://waronwant.org/event/beyond-bhp-oct-2018>



@WarOnWant



facebook.com/waronwant

Email [support@waronwant.org](mailto:support@waronwant.org)

[waronwant.org](http://waronwant.org)



FIGHTING GLOBAL POVERTY

Registered Charity No. 208724  
Registered Company No. 629916