



Rainforest Action Group

RAINFOREST ACTION GROUP MEDIA RELEASE

BHP's hopes for copper blighted by new community resistance

26 November 2019

A community assembly in Intag on the 23rd November – an area BHP touts as being its Ecuador stronghold – ended with the almost unanimous rejection of mining in the area. The meeting was held only the day before rumours surfaced that BHP would be increasing their stake in SolGold.

The assembly held in the Parish of Apuela, Intag, was attended by nearly all the communities in the Parish, with local leaders begging the Parish Government to help them prevent mining companies from entering their communities. Despite being formally invited, BHP representatives did not attend the meeting.

'At the assembly several community presidents denounced BHP's entry into their respective communities, and called for measures to be taken at a higher level to impede future entry. The absence of representatives from BHP seems at odds with their socialisation attempts, and was not viewed favourably by locals who wanted to know the company's plans for the region,' says Liz Downes, a member of the Rainforest Action Group.

*"No representatives of the Cerro Quebrado-BHP company went to the Assembly to appear before the communities, and to share information about their plans and projects for mineral exploration within the Santa Teresa and Santa Teresa mining concessions 2, which affect not only Apuela, but also two neighboring parishes (Plaza Gutierrez and Cuellaje),"*¹ says Mr Carlos Zorilla, environmentalist and co-founder of local environmental group [DECOIN](#).

Representatives from the Ministries of Environment, the Ministry of Energy and Non-Renewable Natural Resources, the Mining Regulation and Control Agency, the Secretariat of Water, and Ecuadorian state mining company Enami also failed to appear.

The assembly was addressed by the Ombudsman of Imbabura, Doctor Katherine Andrade, a representative of the Provincial Government of Imbabura, and expert geologist Pablo Duque, retired dean professor of the National Polytechnic School. Pablo Duque informed the community as to the risks of mining in the region, and explained why large-scale mining could not happen in this area without irreversible environmental damage.

¹ Quote from email. Full email can be forwarded on request.

Apuela sits in the middle of the Santa Teresa 2 mining concession, which belongs to BHP's South American subsidiary Cerro Quebrado. Residents of Intag, a farming region with a history of strong resistance against large-scale mining due to widespread concerns about social and environmental impacts, have expressed concerns over what they consider to be a lack of community consultation and transparency by Cerro Quebrado during the process of gaining permits.

"The Intag region experiences high rainfall and earthquake risk, making mining infrastructure and tailings dams inordinately risky. It also contains the last remnants of mega-biodiverse cloud forests within the Chocó Andes belt, which are habitats for critically endangered species such as the Andean Spectacled Bear. Any disturbance or contamination of rivers would gravely affect the environment as well as the lives of people and endangered species in the region," Ms Downes said.

According to Mr Carlos Zorrilla, a formal resolution and list of demands are expected to be officially announced by the Assembly this week. These will include a demand for the revocation of the mining concessions in the Parish over the lack of environmental consultation; a barring of mining companies from entering the communities; and a request for a full consultation over the entire Intag area.

"There has been persistent and ongoing resistance from locals to mining companies exploring on their lands. To access the Santa Teresa 1 and 2 concessions for exploration activities, BHP employees must use a private road, which the owners have now vowed to bar them from using," says Liz Downes.

BHP's announcement regarding SolGold comes only six weeks after Ecuador erupted in widespread protests over IMF austerities, which caused the IMF to classify the country as a high risk for foreign investment, particularly in extractive industries.

It also comes amid ongoing concerns over serious security issues at the Cascabel project site, where explorations are underway. Cascabel came under fire earlier this year in an intensive investigation by the National Ombudsman, who stated in his report that environmental and other risk assessments done by the company in order to obtain exploration licenses were inadequate.

More details on security concerns at Cascabel can be found [here](#).

"BHP regards Ecuador as being a promising investment due to its potentially large reserves of high-grade copper deposits, which the company considers essential to its plans to supply the global renewable energy sector. We are gravely concerned about rumours concerning BHP increasing their shares in Solgold, despite our warnings to the company at the AGM about the security concerns of Cascabel and other concessions in Ecuador. It is a bitter irony that renewables risk impacting the environment and water supply of such biodiverse forested areas," says Liz Downes.

CONTACT LIZ DOWNES ON 0415 308 041 [or ANTHONY AMIS ON 0425 841564] FOR MORE INFORMATION.

The Melbourne Rainforest Action Group is an independent research and advocacy group focused on issues relating to mining, communities and the environment.



Image credit: DECOIN. From left to right on the board: Pablo Duque, Ombudsman, Parroquo de Apuela, and representative of the Provincial Government.