



Rainforest Action Group

TEAR GAS USED ON UNARMED TOWNSPEOPLE AT BUENOS AIRES, ECUADOR TO FORCE ENTRY TO GINA RINEHART'S MINING CONCESSION

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Approximately 500 armed national police stormed Buenos Aires in the early hours of the 3rd August, using tear gas and military trucks to forcibly clear a path through the town for the mining company Hanrine in what locals say is a significant human rights violation. This was despite a court ruling in June that gave Hanrine ten days to exit the area.

Residents shouted 'illegal!' as military trucks rolled in followed by 11 trucks and other vehicles from the Hanrine Ecuadorian mining company. Four people were charged and detained during the clashes. Hanrine has five concession areas in Buenos Aires where they hope to explore for copper and gold, totalling more than 12,000 hectares.

"Last night, community residents were peacefully protesting in the town when hundreds of National Police entered the tiny town, using teargas on the unarmed women who stood at the front of the crowd. The show of violence on behalf of the mining company is uncalled for and a direct assault on the human rights of the townspeople, as well as their constitutional right for Free, Prior and Informed consent. The inhabitants of the area say they have never been consulted and do not want mining on their land," says Liz Downes, a member of the Rainforest Action Group, a research and advocacy group investigating Australian mining companies acting in Ecuador.

"Tensions have been ongoing for months, with the company blockading the main road to the town for more than a month, and violently attempting to enter the town on a number of occasions. Last week clashes occurred between residents and Hanrine personnel, who tried to forcibly enter the town in contempt of the June ruling, and a townspeople was stabbed four times," says Liz Downes.

In June, a provincial judge [issued precautionary measures against Hanrine](#). This followed events where hundreds of company personnel blocked the only access road in and out of the town for more than 40 days, hoping to force locals to allow them passage to the concession Imba 1. The court ruling gave Hanrine ten days to leave the area. However the company appealed, and last week a Quito judge [accepted a protection action](#) filed by

Hanrine. The new ruling provides that necessary security measures be made to guarantee the free movement of company officials. Legal professionals are condemning the action for protection as 'suspicious' and 'fraudulent'.

The latest events occurred on top of over 100 days of conflict in the region. On April 21, the [Ombudsman's Office of Ecuador called on the National Government](#) to suspend all mining activities in the area, after what it deemed was excessive military force against inhabitants, and citing risks of spreading the Covid-19 Brazilian strain in a community with limited health facilities.

"Essentially two arms of the Ecuador government are opposing each other - with local elected officials, townspeople and the judge of the Multicompetent Judicial Unit of Urcuquí opposing the company's attempts at forced entry into the town, and a Quito judge who ruled in favor of the company last week, allowing national security forces to take any necessary measures to guarantee the free movement of Hanrine officials," says Liz Downes.

"We are deeply concerned about the contemptible actions of Hancock Prospecting via their subsidiary, Hanrine, and strongly condemn their actions. We call on Australians and the Australian government to condemn these actions in Ecuador," says Liz Downes.

Hanrine is also suing Mario Ruiz, a member of the National Assembly who opposes mining in the region and who was instrumental in denouncing the company's behaviour to the Assembly and to human rights and legal organisations. In April, Assemblyman Ruiz was held against his will and threatened for several hours by the company.

Two days ago the Ecuadorian Alliance for Human Rights, representing around 50 different organisations, released a formal statement of alert regarding the use of military force against residents of Buenos Aires, saying:

"We reject the systematic violence perpetrated by the mining company Hanrine ... against the population of La Merced de Buenos Aires ... today on 2nd August, the town is full of military trucks and buses filled with military and police ... all to allow the company Hanrine to conduct activities."



Image: Residents of Buenos Aires protest the incursion of military forces in their town, 3 August 2021. Image courtesy of OMASNE Ecuador.

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