

# MINES & TERRITORY

Year Overview 2019

This **special issue** of Mines & Territory provides an overview of **important events** that took place in 2019 which had an effect on the **socio-ecological reality in Colombia**. In this issue **eight different activists** share with you their thoughts on remarkable events of the passed year. Get reading to find out more about what was moving land rights activists and affected communities in 2019.

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# PEOPLE PARTICIPATION AND AUTONOMY AS AN ANTIDOTE TO COPPER FEVER IN JERICÓ

*The Quebradona mining project of the South African company Anglo Gold Ashanti, based in Jericó, a municipality in the southwestern sub-region of Antioquia was an important element of political discussion at a local, sub-regional and even national level last year.*

With 2019 being a year of planning for municipalities due to the countrywide update of the Land Management Scheme (Esquema de Ordenamiento Territorial), the future of the territory of Jericó was at stake, since the mining company was doing an effort to include the Quebradona extraction project in the land management scheme. One of the company's strategies has been to carry out a media campaign about its "good mining practices" under its "corporate social responsibility" policy and therein denying the many attempts made by the local and affected community during the last ten years to stop this project.

The local movements of Jericó and the neighboring municipalities have managed to put the rejection of mining on the



*Foto by COA*

agenda, on the basis that, in addition to being a project that indiscriminately violates nature, it also has other effects on the region; it jeopardizes the peasant and indigenous traditions present in the area, it affects water sources and their communitarian use, it impedes the local economy that has been developing in the region based on organic agriculture and an economy of solidarity and it threatens the spaces for political participation and decision making, which affects the territorial autonomy.

In this context, organizations such as the Jericó Environmental Roundtable and the sub-regional articulation of the Western Environmental Belt or COA, were able to express the reasons why the Quebradona mining project should not be developed in various places and occasions such as in the Jericó Municipal Council.

During the debates in the Municipal Council the need arose to integrate the Community Life Plan, a proposal of the Western Environmental Belt COA, into



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the Land Management Scheme of the municipality. In that way they put forward the Popular Mandate "Participation and Autonomy to Resignify the Territorial Ordering" to construct Sacred Territories for Life.

This proposal has four main axes: The first is on the uses of the land and the uses of the water. The second on the cultural and environmental patrimony. The third on effective and affective social participation. And finally the fourth is on the territorial popular education.

However, the mining company has been carrying out actions of strategic interference in the process of adjusting and updating of the land management scheme, generating confrontations in institutional spaces such as the Municipal Council, through co-optation and interference in decision-making.

In spite of this panorama, the organizations and the subregional alliance will continue the work of political pressure in the year 2020, putting on the agenda the community and the collective challenges that have been developing for several years in Jericho and the whole southwest Antioquia. Sacred Territories for Life.

*Written by Leidy Lopez  
(translated from Spanish)*

*Leidy is an activist originated from the village of Tamesis belonging to South Western Antioquia. She is part of the youth environmental and land rights group Jodete and of the Western Environmental Belt - COA.*



*Foto by COA*



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# NATIONAL STRIKE IN COLOMBIA

On November 21st, a national strike was organized against the current Colombian government. Thousands of Colombians massively took to the streets to march and demonstrate in different ways against a series of reforms that will drastically affect the daily life and the future of Colombians – ‘Duque’s paquetazo’, as they call it. It is clear that the current government, with these new measures, is not at all interested in improving the collective welfare of society but on the contrary, applying all kinds of negative policies that are detrimental to the living conditions of the working population.



*Foto by COSAJUCA*

Among some of the social and economic reforms that the national government currently wants to implement, the following are known: a reduction of the legal minimum wage for young people between 18 and 28 years old by 25%; a hiring system by the hour which affects the labor and pension stability of thousands of workers; the elimination of the pension as a right of workers and privatization of COLPENSIONS; and a reduction of taxes on large multinationals and companies, with an increase in taxes for the middle class and the workers.



*Foto by COSAJUCA*

Despite the amount of social injustice that the working class of the nation suffers from, the government proposes to restrict the right to protest to the maximum and to criminalise and stigmatise it throughout the country. After these proposals, thousands of people attended mobilisations at the national and international level, with the participation of protesters in other important cities of the world demanding the national government to retract this series of proposed reforms.

At the national level, all kinds of collective actions turned the November 21 strike into a transcendent and impactful act of resistance throughout the country: among others, road blockades were carried out in different cities, different cultural and sporting events were organized in the streets as a symbol of peaceful demonstrations, big marches took place and in the evening hours a ‘cacerolazo’ (a way of protesting using pots and pans to make simultaneously a loud noise) sounded throughout the nation to claim support for the strike that had just occurred.



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After a week went by, the balance was not promising: the government of Duque is trying to answer to the demands of the protesters through a social dialogue, where the motivations for the unrest might be expressed; some speak of organising a constituent assembly, but this requires a lot of time that the protesters do not have.

The people want thorough solutions to problems that affect them directly through public and other policies; the students demand compliance with earlier formed agreements; the working class organisations complain about the policies that have taken away social and economic protection for workers. But these issues cannot be touched upon without profound reforms at the economic level, which puts the ball into the camp of the government. It is time the Colombian government decides how it wants to go down in history; as the precursor of a change that united Colombia under a single banner, or as cowards who tried to silence the legitimate demands of a nation with violence.

*Written by Oriana Castadeña  
(translated from Spanish)*



*Foto by COSAJUCA*

*Oriana is an activist located in Ibagué and belonging to the environmental committee: 'Comité Ambiental en Defensa de la Vida' in the Tolima region. She is also part of the group Mujeres en Defensa del Territorio.*

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# THE SITUATION OF FEMALE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND SOCIAL LEADERS IN COLOMBIA

*The situation of male and female social leaders in Colombia has deteriorated greatly in recent years. Human rights defenders and social leaders have had to face more threats and deaths in the last three years than at any time during the armed conflict.*

The United Nations (UN) estimates that between 1994 and 2014, there have been an average of 33 murders of human rights defenders per year (United Nations, n.d.); while the murders in 2015 amounted to 63, in 2016 to 59, in 2017 to 121 and in 2018 to 110; although they warn that it is not the total of cases (United Nations, 2019). Of the 431 murders of human rights defenders between 2016 and 2018, 48 were against women.

CODHES estimates that of 378 attacks recorded in 2018, 18 were murders against female social leaders and 78 more were attacks against them (Hurtado, Gutiérrez, Gómez, & Barbosa, 2019). Both murders and attacks against women have increased with more than 20% in the last three years and according to Somos Defensores, the



*Foto by Comité en Defensa de la Vida*



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number of female human rights defenders and social leaders killed in 2018 increased with 64.3% compared to the previous year (Somos Defensores, 2018).

In some parts of the country this increase is pronounced more than in others. The CAPAZ institute estimates that in the case of Putumayo, femicide increased by 700% (Tapias Torrado, 2019). The women who are under attack consider that this increase is related to an exacerbated machismo, linked to the militarization of the department, the intensification of the war and drug trafficking, among others (Cortés, 2019).

*“... When they rape them, they humiliate them and almost nobody believes them. Instead if they kill them, they become heroines. Rape is an instrument of domination and control of the female population”  
(Tascón, 2012)*

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Although the increase is worrisome, it usually obscures a more profoundly structural problem of gender violence. When the threats, which preceded the murders in several cases, were directed at female leaders, they had a strong gender component. For example, in many cases, the threats were not only made against the lives of the women in question, but also against the lives of their loved ones, usually their daughters and sons; or in other cases the threats consisted of sexual violence against them or their daughters (Rueda, 2019).

Sexual violence is a tool that is generally used to punish those women who dare to raise their voices to participate in social processes of change or to challenge patriarchal dynamics. But the punishment of the leaders for confronting the structures of oppression does not end with the threats. In the vast majority of cases, there is a secondary punishment: to face multiple obstacles of justice and health; it is common for them to be revictimized and stigmatized and that leads to them being silenced. In this context, female human rights defenders and social leaders have come together to denounce this serious situation, making it visible and claiming their rights (Corporación Mujer Sigue Mis Pasos, 2015).

It is also important to mention that the aforementioned numbers take into

account the murders and attacks against women but fail to take a broader look at the daily expressions of misogyny and intimidation that these women go through. Sexist language, the exclusion of spaces of decision-making or work overload are elements that are not reflected in the statistics and that must also be taken into account if one desires to truly provide an honest analysis of the position of female human rights defenders in Colombia.

*Written by Jonas Adriaenssens*



*Foto by Comité en Defensa de la Vida*

*Jonas is an activist from Belgium who is currently residing in Ibagué, Tolima. He belongs to the organisation CATAPA and, as an ally, works together with Comité Ambiental en Defensa de la Vida, farmers of Cajamarca and Cosajuca.*

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# MINESA KEEPS DWELLING ON SANTURBAN

*In the department of Santander, a Paramó ecosystem, called Santurban, which supplies water to more than 2 million people, continues to be threatened by the extraction of gold and other metals.*

After its first failed attempt, the multinational MINESA SAS, a company from the United Arab Emirates, is seeking an environmental license from the ANLA Environmental Licensing Authority to exploit the high mountain with its SOTONORTE auro-scientific project. The area though, borders what was defined in 2014 as the ecosystem the Páramo of Santurbán.



*Photo by Jorge William Sánchez Latorre*

To be granted the permission to continue the project to its exploitation stage Minesa needs to be granted an environmental license. Minesa therefore submitted its second environmental impact study (or EIA) and applied again for an environmental license in 2019. But for Minesa to obtain the license, the National Environmental Licensing Authority must carry out an evaluation with clear and detailed information. Information that must be reflected in the EIA. However, although this is the company's second



*Photo by Jorge William Sánchez Latorre*

EIA, the environmental authority has requested Minesa to expand and specify the given information about the project on at least 80 points. This procedure got put on stand by during the period of local elections in Colombia in 2019.

Minesa has been in trouble since 2017, the year it presented its first Environmental Impact Study and academics and activists questioned the information the company delivered, the company had to withdraw their request for an environmental license.

## **Minesa's project SOTONORTE explained**

Minesa has the intention to extract polymetallic materials and more than 11 million ounces of gold, over the span of 23 years. The multinational claims that it will not treat the gold with cyanide within Colombian territory, however in the Environmental Impact Study, it is not clear in which country then this highly polluting procedure would be carried out. It should be noted that the project will affect the water intakes of the aqueduct of



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the city of Bucaramanga, which provides drinking water to more than a million people. Water that comes from the rivers and streams that originate in Santurbán.

According to the website of the multinational, without having obtained an environmental license to operate they have made an investment of more than \$30 billion colombian pesos (around 8 million USD) in the region between 2016 and 2018.

The Environmental Impact Assessment claims that Minesa will directly hire close to a thousand workers and offer four thousand indirect jobs. However, the indirect jobs that the company says it will generate, is with counting the suppliers to the mining company, the people who are currently already working for these supplying companies and those who are 'suppliers of the home' of the workers, 'benefitting' from the profits of the direct job. Thus: if dad is hired in MINESA, his wife and children are considered for MINESA as indirect jobs.

### Who will make the decision?

The streets and social media have been the allies in the defense of the territory and of the water of Santander and the neighboring departments, which are all located at the border with Venezuela, this is proven by the enormous mobilizations of multiple sectors of the Santanderean

population. However, the government has designated the Minister of Finance Alberto Carrasquilla to make a decision on the multinational's project, since the current Minister of Environment affirmed having a conflict of interest for having advised the company at some point in his professional career.

Activists and human rights defenders are questioning the appointment of Carrasquilla since, in addition to the well-known links that Minister Carrasquilla has with the government that promotes the foreign investment policy of Álvaro Uribe Velez and with the multinational ODEBRECHT (known for corruption scandals), he also does not belong to the workforce of the Ministry of Environment. It would seem then that this is a purely economic decision for the Colombian State, forgetting the resistance and social mobilization that under one united voice has demanded water quality and protection of life and territory.

According to the article paid by Minesa and published by the newspaper EL TIEMPO on January 27, everything seems to indicate that the multinational company has started up its engines in order to finally obtain the environmental license it so desires.

But the citizens are preparing to mobilise once again. Human rights defenders will not allow this attempt against the environment and life. It's clear that Minesa is a threat to the water of the Colombian people.

*Written by Dayana Corzo  
(translated from Spanish)*

*Dayana is from the region of Santander and lives in Bucaramanga. She has been a defender of the paramó of Santurbán for over 8 years both in student groups as within other organisations in the city.*



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# MINGA INDIGENA

## INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES BLOCKED THE PANAMERICANA HIGHWAY, DEMANDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGREEMENTS MADE WITH FORMER GOVERNMENTS, AND GUARANTEES FOR THEIR RIGHTS.

*Since Duque took office in 2018, he did not take any time to address the indigenous organizations in Colombia's Cauca department. As a result, people in southwestern Colombia started mobilizing protests across highways on March 10th last year to demand a meeting with the president. Their main frustrations are the governments passivity towards the agreements made during the previous administration's historic 2016 peace deal and the recognition of community land rights. A resume of a month full of frustration, repression and violence... but also a story about courage, hope and unity.*

The demands of the protesters participating in the Minga are clear. They include the incorporation of ethnic communities in the government's recently announced National Development Plan; the protection of community leaders from targeted assassinations; and the guarantee of prior consultation (= consulta previa) for extractive or agro-industrial projects with impacts on indigenous territory.

In the same vein, they also expressed their opposition to three pilot projects in the



Magdalena River valley where big oil companies got a green light from the government to experiment with fracking, a much questioned method for oil extraction because of the environmental risks it brings along.

Furthermore they demand the full restitution of 400 square kilometers (154 square miles) of land that was promised to indigenous people in the Cauca department by the former president, Juan Manuel Santos. Until March, only 14 square kilometers (5.4 square miles) had been delivered.

Duque initially refused to travel to the Cauca region to meet with indigenous organizations unless the roadblock created by the protesters, which was definitely having a negative impact on the economy, would be lifted. But the protests went on. During a massive mobilization on March 27, protest leaders estimated there were 20,000 people involved including Afro-



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Colombian and indigenous communities, students and associations of peasant farmers. The government's response that day was a violent one: a crackdown by the police's anti-riot squad ESMAD in order to regain the Panamerican highway. The crackdown was seen as an attack against the entire dialogue process that has existed up till then within the Minga; against the security and the life of every person in the camp peacefully standing up for their rights.

On March 22nd, an explosion in remote indigenous territory in the Valle del Cauca department killed nine indigenous protesters. Minister of Defense Guillermo Botero's statement that "the accident" was most probably caused by the indigenous people itself got firmly rejected by the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC) as they assured the incident was a paramilitary-led massacre

.After twenty-six days of blockades on the Pan-American highway, the indigenous Minga came to an end on April 5th. The government and the protesters had reached an economic agreement of 843,000 million colombian pesos. One of the conditions of the agreement was a public dialogue between the 'Mingeros' and Duque, as for the Minga it was essential that Duque would publicly sign the agreements they had reached, which would give it a legal perspective.

After many delays and pretexts, Ivan Duque reached the municipality of Caldonio, although he did not make it to listen to the mingueros and mingueras. Reason: "Concerns about the security of the President". Duque asked if the meeting could be held behind closed doors, only with the most important leaders. But the Minga did not accept that proposal. Tensions between the government and indigenous communities calmed somehow down since april, but are definitely still present in Colombia. The Minga left eighty-eight people wounded and nine dead, including a young mingero who got killed by ESMAD bullets that hit him in the chest. Without counting the other 125 Indigenous people that were murdered in Colombia during the last year and a half while peacefully trying to defend their rights, traditions and ancient territories.

*Written by Sam Packet*

*Sam packet is a Catapista who spend six months in Colombia last year, participating and supporting local activists in Cajamarca and reporting on socio-ecological news for Mines&Territory.*



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# MOVIMIENTO NACIONAL AMBIENTAL

The National Environmental Movement is a process of linking different grassroots social organisations, environmental platforms and Colombian NGOs that since 2017 have been promoting a space for national alliance with the aim of continuing to strengthen the processes of defending water, life and the territories that oppose the imposition of mining, oil and hydroelectric projects throughout the national territory.

That is why, through the use of legal tools, political advocacy, mobilization with non-violent approaches, popular education and training and awareness strategies, they seek to halt the increase of a model that destroys ecosystems, putting the lives of present and future generations at serious risk. Similarly, the activists belonging to the National Environmental Movement believe that the defense of land, water and life should always go hand in hand with the defense of the human rights of the communities, which is why it has been working to strengthen the collectives and the physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual integrity of the people who are part of the different organisations and movements.

The national environmental movement of Colombia, which brings together more than 150 environmental organisations, held its sixth national meeting in November 2019. In this organisational space the decision was taken to carry out the first Colombian national environmental strike between June 1st and 5th of 2020.

Historically, the governments of Colombia have sacrificed natural environments, strategic ecosystems, biodiversity, water, landscape, culture and the collective right to a healthy environment in order to benefit the wrongly named "development". Today we are living the consequences of these decisions and as always these affect, fundamentally, the poorest sectors of the country and the middle class.

Today the future of present and future generations is at stake. Our responsibility is to leave them a country and a planet where they can live with joy and dignity. For these reasons, the National Government is required to immediately implement the prohibition of fracking, contaminating mining and glyphosate spraying; to unrestrictedly respect the popular consultations taken place and the



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voice of the communities and different ethnic groups in their territories; to ratify the UN declaration on the rights of peasants; to protect the páramos ecosystems, high Andean forests and strategic ecosystems that are indispensable for water regulation; as well as to comply with the provisions of the sentences that granted rights to the Colombian Amazon, our rivers and nature in general.

There are plenty of reasons and motives to build collective protagonisms, with an intergenerational and intersectional perspective, that are capable of stopping the social and environmental injustices promoted by the capitalist, patriarchal, homophobic and racist system that today dominates the entire world.

The Colombian national government is requested to attend the demands of the National Environmental Movement and the various organizations that are building this process with a negotiation table that will attend to the list of requests.

*Written by Carolina Monje  
(translated from Spanish)*



*Foto by Karlijn Van den Broeck*



*Foto by Karlijn Van den Broeck*

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# LOSERS AND WINNERS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PEACE DEAL IN COLOMBIA

Three years ago, in Colombia, the world saw what was called the last march of the FARC, the biggest Marxist guerrilla in the world. After the signature of the peace agreement in November of 2016, the former members of FARC walked kilometers as they were used in the war times to give their only belong: their weapons. They did it in ex-change of six points: Rural Reform, Political Participation, End of the conflict, Solution to the problem of illicit drugs, The Integral System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and No-repetition; and the implementation, verification and endorsement. The agreement was considered as one of the most progressive in the world, the impunity levels were diminished due to the participation of the victims during the peace talks. The peace deal in Colombia meant the end of a 50 years old conflict, which was the result of decades of struggle for peace, land and life, especially in the rural areas.

The government of Juan Manuel Santos (former Colombian president) signed the peace deal with the FARC guerrilla and started the implementation of the



*Foto by Bart Carlier*

agreement. Since the “last march of the FARC” Colombian State showed its disability and negligence to accomplish the compromises made to the guerrilla and the civil society. The special areas where FARC members were supposed to concentrate and deliver their weapons were not ready, troops arrived in areas with no guarantees for living or at least sufficient infrastructure to complete the weapons disposal. The troops built the necessary facilities to live and keep their acquired commitment with the peace deal.

At the same time, the government started a precarious institutional arrangement in order to implement the peace agreement, Santos signed presidential decrees in order to speed up the implementation. In the field, the first obstacles began to appear: the lack of institutional coordination, the inability to react and the absence of political will on the part of some public officials to implement the peace agreement.

Despite these initial limitations, the rural



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population maintained its expectations and commitment to the agreement. Grassroots organizations began to actively participate in the administration and implementation of the public policies that came out of the agreement. An example of this is the appearance of the National Coordinator of Coca, Marihuana and Poppy Growers (COCCAM). An organization aimed to concrete the participation of coca's producers and collectors and to dynamize the implementation of the fourth point of the Peace Agreement.

COCCAM was launched in 2017 in the southwestern of the country, one of the areas with higher illicit crops density and it could be understood as a social movement attempt to formalize the organizational structures from Colombian peasantry. Five thousand coca growers and farmers marched through Popayan to launch the first National organization of coca growers under the slogan "we are farmers, workers like you". COCCAM launch is the best example to show the main meaning of the peace agreement for marginalized communities, the possibility to be considered in policymaking, the possibility of right recognition by a State that has always chased and criminalized them. The compromise with the peace deal from rural communities was evident, as well as the support of the former guerrilla with the new programs and initiative emerging from the post-conflict setting.

In 2018 Juan Manuel Santos former Colombian president and Nobel prize left office with 609 social leaders assassinated. Ivan Duque Márquez with the support of Alvaro Uribe Vélez won the elections and took office in August, in his first year of government 226 social leaders were assassinated. On the contrary to the expected effects of the peace agreement violence levels increased in rural areas,

the government insists on the denying of the systematic character of the murders and has not provided yet any solution to guarantee life and integrity of social leaders.

The election of Duque further delayed the implementation process, since his arrival to the presidency the number of murders of social leaders increased significantly and started a process of dismantling the peace agreement. This was evidenced by the objections presented to the bill that regulated the special justice for peace that was at the heart of the peace agreement.

The special electoral districts for conflict zones were removed from the agreement by the national congress, and a smear



*Foto by Bart Carlier*

campaign was launched on the judges and magistrates of the special justice for peace, led by the congress and the presidency. The integral rural reform of the agreement has so far remained in promises, the government's actions to implement it have been reduced and it has been left in the hands of civil society organisations that continue to support it, as well as some cooperation agencies that have wanted to help in its implementation. However, the money from the cooperation agencies has not reached the communities; on the contrary, it has been lost in the

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Colombian bureaucracy and corruption. The communities and beneficiaries of these programmes continue to demand transparency in the execution of projects, but above all that the resources reach their beneficiaries.

Equally precarious is the situation of ex-combatants, who have complied with the laying down of arms, but who still do not have guaranteed integral reincorporation in the society. the economic reincorporation foreseen in the peace agreement has not been developed; ex-combatants presented 54 productive projects, of which 22 were approved and so far 2 have been disbursed. This situation leaves ex-combatants in limbo and void that seems to be filled only by new armed actors, dissidents, neo-paramilitary gangs and drug trafficking mafias.

To date, the government has not committed itself to guarantee a transition to peace; on the contrary, it is promoting illegal fronts such as drug trafficking, illegal logging and illegal mining. The public policies outlined in Ivan Duque's National Development Plan do not seek to provide an answer to alleviate these problems; on the contrary, they seem to encourage them. This is not a minor assertion since this is a state whose policies today seem to be at the service of a political elite and its mafias who have profited from the war and whose political capital depends entirely on the war.

In August 2019, some commanders of the former FARC guerrilla announced their return to arms. The announcement shocked the country, the image and the message showed that the expectations and commitments of the peace agreement were not met. There are many reasons that explain this event: a mediocre and

badly done implementation, the absence of guarantees for the security and integrity of the ex-combatants, the political persecution of some leaders of the FARC and the fragmentation of a social movement for peace with the capacity to demand that the government comply with a State pact.

In Colombia the ghost of war does not disappear, illegal economies are strengthened and camouflaged among agrarian entrepreneurs responsible for dispossessing peasants of their land. The losers and victims of this situation are the peasants, indigenous people and afro-descendants who are killed for defending their territories and lands. The winners are the same as always: 1% of the owners own 88% of the productive land, occupy seats in the national congress and whose wealth has been made possible by the war. Three years after the last march of the FARC a community of about 100 ex-combatants was displaced from the space they inhabited by mandate of the agreement. The war does not want to leave Colombia, there are those who do not let it go and in their eagerness to accumulate land, power and votes are willing to do whatever is necessary to maintain it regardless of the consequences, lives, human losses and impacts on nature.

Recovering the peace agreement in its essence is indispensable for those who have lost historically in Colombia to be restored with their rights, their land and the truth in order to build a peaceful and democratic society. Overcome one hundred years of loneliness and build a country for its peasant, indigenous and black majorities who have been denied the least right: the right to life.

*Written by Itayosara Rojas*

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# FROM THE POLLS TO THE TRIBUNAL: THE FARMERS OF CAJAMARCA SUING A MINING MULTINATIONAL

*The farming community that voted out multinational AngloGold Ashanti of their territory two years ago, is now taking the fight to court.*

In March 2017, the people of Cajamarca voted against mining in their region in a Consulta Popular (popular referendum). Two years later the same community is going to court to continue their fight, for AngloGold Ashanti still owns various mining concessions in the region. And to ensure their absence for once and for all, the farmers are suing the company and the National Mining Agency to nullify the still existing mining concessions.

In Cajamarca, all seems quiet and peaceful. Farmers on the hill work their land, no machinery involved. It is a hard job, but they would not trade it for the world. The fertile soil of Cajamarca makes it a very rewarding region for farming: 'Anything grows in Cajamarca.'

Looking over Cajamarca, the impressive waterfall Chorros Blancos provides water for the citizens of the village center. Many other small water springs guarantee water to the farming families' directly to their land. The Wax Palms Forest and the Machin Volcano in Toche guard Cajamarca on one side, and on the other side the Páramo of Anaime can be found. If you ask the citizens, they will tell you they are proud to live in Cajamarca, that this land is incredibly beautiful and



*Foto by Tierra Digna*

precious. And any visitor would have to agree with them. However, the people of Cajamarca have struggled a lot to get where they are today. From the beginning of the settlement, violence has been brought to the region, from colonization to the period of 'la violencia' and later the armed conflict. When after hundreds of years of war, Colombia, and thus Cajamarca, was finally beginning a new era of 'peace', it was only for a short time until a new threat arrived in Cajamarca: Extractivism.

More than ten years ago, the Colombian government gave mining concessions to the South-African gold mining

*Collection,  
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multinational AngloGold Ashanti, who with their La Colosa mining project would open the biggest open pit mine in Latin America. The village however, came together to defend their farming lands, their precious water sources and the future of their children. On the 26th of March 2017, Cajamarca organised a Consulta Popular, a binding mechanism of public participation stated by the Colombian constitution, where 98% of voters voted against mega mining in their territories.

The result of the Consulta Popular, a Cajamarca free of mining activities, was later established in a municipal agreement. The decision of the people of Cajamarca is legally binding and thus has to be respected by both the multinational as the national government. However, the National Mining Agency of Colombia has continued administrative actions regarding the existing mining concessions, without consulting nor informing the community.

There are still three current mining concessions in the municipality of Cajamarca. Therefore, the decision of the people of Cajamarca has neither been respected nor implemented until now. The farmers of Cajamarca are demanding the nullification of the three current mining concessions in the municipality. They invoke the legal principle of objeto ilícito sobreveniente: the mining concessions have to cease to exist since they are incompatible with the choice of the community of Cajamarca to prohibit mining. Following Colombian law, a contract needs to have an object that complies with the legal and constitutional requirements. The subject of the mining concessions is illicit and impossible to accomplish. The subject was licit when the concessions were granted, yet, after the consulta popular, it is no longer the case.



*Foto by Karlijn Van den Broeck*

With the legal action the farmers of Cajamarca hope to finally achieve the full respect and execution of the decision that the community took in March, 2017, prohibiting mining in their region.

Suing a multinational is not for the light hearted. In Colombia, environmental defenders that are struggling to remain in their lands despite corporate interests, have been the target of threats, human rights violations and killings. Moreover, the legal road is always a very long and tiring one. Nevertheless, the community of Cajamarca knows what they want: A healthy and thriving farming community, with clean waters and lush mountains.

This court case, just like the countless manifestations and the consulta popular before them, is the people of Cajamarca shouting:

*“El Agua vale más que el oro, AngloGold Ashanti Fuera del Pais” (Water is worth more than gold, AngloGold Ashanti out of the Country)*

*Written by Karlijn Van den Broeck*

*Karlijn Van den Broeck is a CATAPISTA who lived in Cajamarca, Colombia from the beginning of 2018 and into 2019, she worked for and with local anti-extractivist movements.*

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# WHAT THE COLOMBIAN ELECTIONS HAVE MEANT FOR THE 'ENVIRONMENT'

*In Colombia the local and regional elections were held on the 27th of October 2019. Election campaigns included the stakes for the defense of the territories and environmental defenders from all over the country were part of political initiatives and even took on candidacies to get elected. Issues such as the climate emergency, fracking and the defense of water versus the exploitation of the Páramos ecosystems through mining projects, were campaign focuses in different corners of the Colombian territory. As expected, the support of companies towards certain candidates or parties also shifted. Companies need local approval so they didn't miss the opportunity to use the electoral game in their favor, this became very clear in Santander.*

## THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY.

### The good

In Tolima, where one of the great challenges lies in defending Colombia's agricultural food barn, the village of Cajamarca, the environmental candidates had very good results. Environmental activist Renzo García was elected to the Departmental Assembly, and his companion Jaime Tocora also won a seat at the Ibagué municipal council. Another event to celebrate was the triumph of the new mayor of Cajamarca, the peasant Julio Roberto, who belongs to the environmental committee of Cajamarca and is an unquestionable ally in the fight against one of the threats of the southern region of Colombia: the mining multinational AngloGold Ashanti and the



project for extracting gold, called La Colosa.

The struggle against fracking in Boyacá was in the hands of environmental candidate Estefany Grajales. Rosa Ballesteros in Cundinamarca also ran in the elections after the great results of the popular consultation against fracking in Fusagasugá. In Bogotá, environmentalist Susana Muhamad won a seat on the city council of the capital after a tireless struggle against the theft of votes from the traditional parties. Melissa Cuevas positioned herself with an incredible process of communitarian sponsored and executed politics in Teusaquillo, Bogotá. In Santander, Ricardo Eslava tried to put the declaration of a climate emergency on the political agenda. And in that same department, Emiro Arias and Leónidas Gómez both put the defense of the Paramo of Santurbán as a priority during their candidacies.

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### **The bad**

However, the mining multinational Minesa, with its aim to extract gold in the Páramo ecosystem of Santurbán in the region of Santander, could become the big winner in this contest, its candidate for governor of Santander was elected and several of the candidates who support the big mining project. Close allies of the company are now in charge of public functions of local territorial administration and control and are making part of the municipal councils in the area.

### **The ugly**

The biggest disappointment of these elections is that, despite the fact that there were a considerable number of women who participated with environmentalist political agendas in the 2019 electoral race, only Susana, after her fight against corruption, had her seat. It is a great challenge for the Environmental Movement in Colombia to ensure that the gender gap is not an issue that is replicated in a space that defends territories, life and human rights.

*Written by Dayana Corzo  
(translated from Spanish)*

### **About CATAPA**

CATAPA is a volunteering organization (°2005) that works around sustainable development and alternative globalisation, with a focus on the mining issues and Latin America.

To contribute concretely to a sustainable solution for the ecological and climate crisis, we encourage a fairer mining industry and a more sustainable use of metals. We do this through awareness raising, networking, research, lobbying, exchange programs and supporting farming communities that are threatened by multinational mining companies in our partner countries Bolivia, Colombia and Peru. CATAPA also follows some open-pit mining cases in Europe, especially in Romania and Greece.

CATAPA is short for Comité Académico Técnico de Asesoramiento a Problemas Ambientales, literally Technical Academic Committee for Assistance in Environmental Issues.

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