



The People's Gathering for Life, Ecuador

Press Secretary of the Coordinadora Campesina Popular of Morona Santiago

From the 24th to the 27th the People's Gathering for Life (*Encuentro de los Pueblos por la Vida*) took place in Sigsig, Cuenca and Gualaquiza, Ecuador. The gathering was called together by the Peoples' World Health Movement-Latin America, the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Cuenca, the National Front for the Health of the Peoples of Ecuador, la *Coordinadora Campesina Popular*, Ecological Action, the Commission for Environmental Defense of Victoria del Portete, and the Committee for the Defense of Life and Against Mining in Sigsig.

Thousands of people congregated at Sigsig's Coliseum on the 24th. It is estimated that at least 3 thousand people participated on this first day, in which organizations and communities of Azuay, Loja, Morona, Zamora, Imbabura, Pichincha and Bolivar were able to listen to the presentations about the impacts of large scale and open pit mining on human health, after which several testimonials from various

places throughout the country and abroad demonstrated the grave threat that this type of mining represents for the life and health of the people. After this, a march for water was carried out to express the peoples' desire to defend the vital resource of water as a human right and to avoid its control by transnational corporations, especially mining companies.

On the 25th and 26th, the need for *unity* and *organization* in facing common enemies—who will go to any lengths and will resort to aggression to accomplish their perverse ends - was made clear by presentations and testimonials of experts and community representatives.

In spite of the death of the Minister of Defense, Guadalupe Larriva, participation in Cuenca was massive on both days. Present were hundreds of men and women from the communities where transnational mining companies (mostly from Canada) have obtained concessions without consultation and without

the population having any idea about how open pit mining is carried out. The population has been deceived, manipulated and extorted many times with the complicity of government authorities, media, and enforcement entities. Friday's theme,

"Geopolitics, Militarism and Mining" was of great importance. The presentations of experts and various testimonials put into question the role of the armed forces in the conflicts with the transnational mining companies, especially in the cases of Intag (Imbabura) and El Pangui (Zamora Chinchipe) and the loss of national sovereignty that results from handing over thousands of hectares of Ecuadorian territory to the transnational mining companies.

Many other expressions of protest went along with the event such as the premiere of the documentary *Winds of Amazonia* (*Vientos de la Amazonia*) from the city of Cuenca, a photographic exposition about the conflicts in Jimbitono and Tundaime, par-

ticipation of musical and dance groups, and a presentation with photographs and music by the young artist from Gualaquiza, Cristian Guarniso, in representation of the Committee in Defense of the Life of Gualaquiza.

On Friday the 26th the Declaration of the gathering was made, where the formation of the Coordination for the Defense of Life and National Sovereignty was announced. This is to be a coalition of communities and organizations to face the thieves of our natural resources, violators of human rights and of our sovereignty. This coalition is formed by: the Commission for Environmental Defense of Victoria del Portete and Tarqui, Consortium of parochial boards of the Chordej Canton, CONFEMEC (Azuay), Women's Lobby of Cuenca, Political Coordination of Women, El Lirio-Racar Bajo Community, *junta parroquial* of Delegsol, Committee in Defense of Water (*parroquia* Octavio Cordero Palacios), San

Felipe de Molletura Com-mune, *Coordinadora Campesina Popular of Morona Santiago*, Committee in Defense of the Life of Galaquiza, Shuar Kupiamais Center, Shuar Association of Bomboiza, Committee in Defense of the Life of El Panguí (Zamora Chinchipe), Women's Front in Defense of Life in El Panguí, Shuar Association of El Panguí, South Resistance, Federation of Barrios of Quito, the Federation of University Students of Ecuador FEUE, Network of Popular Ecologists of Ecuador, Assembly of La Floresta, Ecological Action, National Front for the Peoples' Health, *junta parroquial* of Pacto (Pichincha), Defense and Ecological Conservation of Intag (DECOIN), Junin Ecotourism (Intag).

Amongst the first tasks to be undertaken by the Coordination for the Defense of Life and National Sovereignty will be to send a letter to the minister of energy and mining, Econ. Alberto Acosta, answering his letter directed to the attendees of this gathering, requesting from him a hearing to discuss the conditions that the organizations and communities have before opening the national dialogue that Econ. Acosta proposes. These conditions are:

1. The country must enter a moratorium in the delivery of new mining concessions.
2. The country must guard its natural resources, as

well as the safety of its population, reason for which large scale mining activity should be suspended, as well as all the mechanisms of extortion and blackmail used by mining companies against local populations.

3. We propose that the national dialogue be geared towards making a proposal for constitutional change, which could serve as a foundation to give priority to life and sovereignty, above the sale and destruction of our resources.

Depending on the minister's answer, the Coordination will make decisions based on the urgent needs and demands of the points of conflict with the transnational mining companies.

We are convinced that the unity achieved as a result of this gathering will be invaluable in the fight against the foreign invaders that will never make their perverse plans a reality while the people are willing to fight for justice and freedom.

Defenders of the Canadian invaders do not allow an international commission to make observations in Tundaime

On Saturday, as part of the program of the People's Gathering for Life, an observation visit was planned by an international commission to verify the situation of militarization in Tundaime. This commission was formed by Maria

Hamlin Zuniga (Nicaragua), Luis Manuel Clips (Argentina), Ximena Warnaars (Netherlands), Andres Caballero (Peru), Barbara Silva (Brasil) and the former Minister of Energy and Mining of Ecuador, Edgar Isch.

This commission of professionals and activists had the objective of verifying the presence of military force that has been guarding the facilities of the mining company Ecuacorriente since the 1st of the month. The commission was denied passage over the bridge over the Chuchumbleza river by supporters of the company.

Along with the commission was Edgar Isch, former minister of Environment, who protested to the authorities of Zamora who were present but were unable to do anything to prevent the defenders of Ecuacorriente from aggressively denying the commission passage.

From the 1st to the 4th of January, the population of Morona and Zamora was also denied access to the area of Tundaime in which Ecuacorriente operates, the same action that is now taken against the international commission. The motive for these actions is unknown, but it is highly suspicious that free transit is denied to Ecuadorian citizens and foreigners in this territory. Could it be that it is no longer Ecuadorian territory? Is Tundaime now Canadian soil?

To all this we must add that the Public Works barge that serviced the Zamora river was put out of service by the chief of the Galaquiza brigade since the 1st of December and to this day has not been put in service. The part that was extracted from the engine is still in the hands of the *junta parroquial* of Tundaime and no authority has demanded that something be done to fix this mode of transportation that was used by the communities in the area.

We demand that these violations to our national sovereignty end now.

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