

Common Frontiers-Canada
Council of Canadians
MiningWatch Canada
United Steelworkers

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**Documents Show Corruption and Intimidation by Canadian Mining Firm Blackfire
in Its Mexican operations – Ottawa Must Investigate Immediately**

Harper government must adopt legislation to punish corrupt practices by Canadian-based mining corporations

(Ottawa, Toronto, Vancouver) On November 27, 2009, Mariano Abarca Roblero, a prominent Mexican anti-mining activist, was shot to death in front of his home in the community of Chicomuselo, Chiapas.

Mr. Abarca was a leader of the Mexican Network of People Affected by Mining (REMA, from the Spanish) and one of the most important figures to publicly denounce the negative social and environmental impacts of Canadian mining company Blackfire Exploration Ltd.'s open-pit barite mine in Chiapas. Just days before his murder Mariano Abarca filed charges against two Blackfire employees for threatening to shoot him if he didn't stop organizing local farmers protesting the loss of their land and livelihood to the mine. Three men linked to Blackfire have been arrested for his murder.

"This tragic outcome can be traced directly to the Harper government's refusal to end the impunity currently enjoyed by Canadian mining companies," commented Maude Barlow, national chairperson of the Council of Canadians.

Documents recently filed by REMA with the Chiapas Attorney General's Office have exposed Blackfire's involvement in the corruption of local officials for the purpose of intimidating opponents to the open pit mine. "We have obtained documents – which Blackfire admits are genuine – that clearly show payments of US\$1,000 a month going directly into the Mayor of Chicomuselo's bank account on the understanding that municipal authorities would keep community members opposed to the mine under control," explained Rick Arnold, coordinator for Common Frontiers-Canada.

On December 9, the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, and Peter Kent, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs (Americas) were confronted with the aftermath of the Abarca murder during their recent visit to San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas. Jean characterized it as "appalling and unacceptable." Kent, however, made a point of lauding Canadian mining activity in Mexico. REMA's repeated requests for a meeting with the Canadian delegation to inform them about the circumstances surrounding the murder of Mr. Abarca, including Blackfire's activities, were denied.

“It is tragic that people with serious and valid concerns, such as those from Chicomuselo, are threatened, abused, and killed instead of having those concerns taken seriously by local authorities, the company, or the Canadian government,” said Jamie Kneen, Communications Coordinator for MiningWatch Canada.

“Mining and oil and gas companies are the face of Canada abroad,” said Steve Hunt, District 3 Director for USW. “Yet, when Steelworker members employed in mining carry out labour exchanges in countries such as Mexico, Argentina and Guatemala, we find a huge disparity between the corporate behaviour of these companies at home and their corporate behaviour abroad.”

Mr. Hunt added, “In Canada, unions have fought long and hard to establish decent wages and pensions, safe workplaces through joint health and safety initiatives, and environmental measures to protect surrounding communities. The mining companies claim to take these best practices with them when they go to developing countries, but our experience on the ground shows differently.”

Given the documented evidence of corrupt practices and intimidation on the part of Blackfire, the four organizations are pursuing a complaint to the RCMP under the *Corruption of Foreign Public Officials Act (1998, c.34)* asking them to immediately initiate a criminal investigation of Blackfire Exploration Ltd.’s activities in Chiapas, Mexico. They also call on the Canadian government to issue an immediate public rebuke to Blackfire Exploration Ltd.

Instead of turning a blind eye to the negative impact that Canadian extractive industry operations are having on affected communities in Mexico and around the world, the Canadian government needs to put a stop to these harmful activities by supporting legislation that would make Canadian based mining corporations answerable to courts in Canada for their behaviour overseas.

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