



Common Frontiers-Canada

MEDIA ADVISORY:
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DECEMBER 6, 2009

Two employees of Canadian mining firm Blackfire arrested in Mexico for murder of prominent anti-mining activist Mariano Abarca Robledo

[Roseneath] On November 27, 2009, Mariano Abarca Robledo, a prominent Mexican anti-mining activist, was shot to death in the community of Chicomuselo, Chiapas.

Mr. Mariano Abarca was a leader of the Mexican Network of People Affected by Mining (REMA) and one of the most important figures to publicly denounce the negative impact on the environment in Chiapas coming from the extractive operations of the Canadian mining firm Blackfire.

This killing has been condemned by the Mexico Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights as well as by a multitude of Mexican and Canadian non-governmental organizations. As a direct result of this killing, coming as it has on the heels of public threats made by Blackfire employees against the life of Mariano Abarca, several hundred people demonstrated outside the Canadian Embassy in Mexico City on December 3, 2009. The protestors not only demanded swift justice in the case of Mr. Abarca, but there were also calls for action from Canadian authorities to halt a disturbing track record of mistreatment of community members by Canadian mining firms operating in Mexico.

In an announcement sure to impact on relations between the two countries, the Solicitor General's Office in Chiapas has just announced the arrest of two employees of the Canadian mining company Blackfire, naming them as the perpetrators of the planned execution of Mariano Abarca.

The Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, will be visiting Chiapas on December 8 and 9. The Governor General's role outside of Canada is often seen as one of good-will Ambassador who burnishes Canada's image while visiting grass-roots communities in other countries. However, the reality now is that Canada's reputation as a defender of human and social rights has been tarnished in Mexico due to the behaviour of mining firms such as Blackfire.

Common Frontiers has written to Her Excellency calling on her to meet with REMA members grieving the loss of Mr. Abarca to hear first-hand about the circumstances behind this tragedy.

"As well as listening to community concerns in Chiapas", says Rick Arnold, Common Frontiers-Canada, "such a meeting could shine a light on the need for government to enact laws to reign in the worst practices of Canadian mining companies operating beyond our borders".

enc. CF letter to Governor General
Common Frontiers-Canada

Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean
Governor General of Canada
Rideau Hall
1 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A1

December 6, 2009

Your Excellency;

We are writing to you as you embark on your 10 day trip to Mexico, Guatemala and Costa Rica to express our hope that your community visits and other gatherings will prove to be enlightening and spirit-boosting for those you meet as well as for yourself.

You are likely aware by now of the tragic killing of Mariano Abarca Roblero that took place on November 27 in the community of Chicomuselo, Chiapas. Mr Mariano Abarca was a member of the Mexican Network of People Affected by Mining (REMA), and one of the most important public figures to be speaking out against the negative consequences to the environment of the work being carried out by mining companies in the area.

This killing has been condemned by the Mexico Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OACNUDH) as well as by a multitude of non-governmental organizations from Mexico as well as from Canada. This unfortunate event has a Canadian connection as staff of the Canadian mining company Blackfire have been arrested, under orders from the Solicitor General's Office in Chiapas, as the material authors of the shooting of Mr. Abarca.

Recently Canada's good name as an upholder of human and social rights has been tarnished by several stories appearing in the Mexican press regarding the actions of Canadian mining companies in various parts of Mexico. The killing of Mr. Mariano Abarca is seen by many Mexican communities as the last straw in terms mistreatment by these mining firms. According to the communities affected, this behavior has taken the form of threats and intimidation combined with a continual plunder of natural resources that is happening on their lands and without their consent leading to an unacceptable contamination of their waters and lands.

On Thursday, December 3rd several hundred people, including many who had traveled all the way from Chiapas, held a demonstration outside the Canadian Embassy in Mexico City to let Canadian authorities know of their frustration and their rising anger towards these Canadian firms. Among several demands voiced at this protest was a call for Canada to enact laws that would serve to put an end to the worst practices of mining companies whether their operations are at home, or beyond Canada's borders.

Your Excellency, it is to be hoped that your time in Mexico will serve to move this situation in a positive direction that will begin to restore luster to Canada's image.

Common Frontiers requests that Your Excellency meet with members of the Chiapas Chapter of REMA when you are in San Cristobal de las Casas to be fully briefed on the circumstances surrounding this heinous act. There are many communities in Chiapas that would be very favourably impressed if Canada's Governor General would take the time to listen to their concerns.

To set up an appointment to see REMA leaders while in Chiapas, please contact Mr. Gustavo Castro who is the Coordinator of REMA-CHIAPAS. You can call Mr. Gustavo Castro at home #967-631-5474, or on his cell phone # 967-125-8462.

We appreciate Your Excellency taking the time to consider this important request.

Yours sincerely,

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