

Complaint against Barrick Gold in Argentina for violation of OECD Guidelines¹

Today, the Citizen Participation Forum for Justice and Human Rights, FOCO, along with the Asociación Ecologista Inti Chuteh (San Juan); Asamblea Popular por el Agua (Mendoza); Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos de La Matanza; Bienaventurados los Pobres (Catamarca); Conciencia Solidaria al Cuidado del Medio Ambiente, el Equilibrio ecológico y los derechos humanos Asociación Civil (San Juan); National Deputy Victoria Donda; National Deputy Miguel Bonasso; the Frente Cívico por la Vida (San Juan); Nora Cortiñas; Organización de Naciones y



Pueblos Indígenas en Argentina and the Inter-American Platform for Human Rights, Democracy and Development, presented a formal complaint before **the National Contact Point (NCP) at the Federal Chancellory (department for OECD affairs) based on violations made by the Barrick Gold Company to the OECD Guidelines.**

Barrick Gold, a Canadian company, is one of the world's largest multinational companies, with more than 27 operating mines in 15 countries worldwide. In 2005 a mine was set up at the Province of San Juan (Argentina), under the name of Veladero. This mine is currently in progress, bordering Chile, and such project is known as the “Pascua Lama” project, which presents gold reserves of 17.8 million ounces. Both projects follow the open pit mining system, a modality already banned in Canada, but still approved in Argentina after local governments’ complicity during the 90’s, due to the economic framework resulting in impunity.

In the above mentioned accusation, social organizations highlight systematic violations made by this company to the **General Principles** of the Guidelines, particularly to the chapters referring to **Protection and Care of the Environment**, which has been severely affected by the company activities.

Among the terrible damages reported, **the pollution of superficial and underground waters** must be mentioned, due to the use of extremely poisonous chemicals, to watercourse deviations (both surface and underground water currents) belonging to the basins of las Taguas, Blanco and Jáchal rivers; **air pollution** due to blastings and drillings, spreading dust particles such as rocks, metals, arsenic, etc.; **soil pollution** after the transportation of dangerous substances, the use of large-sized machinery or the acid drainage activity linked to the projects; **glaciers pollution**: in 2005 Barrick destroyed Conconta glacier, which supplied Tudcum river. Apart from this, the Company hid data related to the presence of other ice bodies, failing to play the regulatory role they have been supposedly assigned over the river

¹ The Guidelines are a set of principles regarding human rights, labor, and environment, among others, that companies in the OECD countries undertake to respect in the countries where they operate.

waters in the area, weakening their protection, which is essential as a measure against climate change; **biodiversity deterioration**: in the Pascua Lama – Veladero case many humid environments, basic for the development of the area's biodiversity, have been eliminated.

In addition to this situation, the impact of **social damages must be considered**, meaning the serious consequences on the population's health: in Jáchal a large percentage of the population presents liver, stomach and kidney cancer, among others. Apart from that, the impacts on the **Regional Economy** should be mentioned: the region suffers a loss in value, being considered as a tourist destination, because of the destruction of natural landscapes and the access restrictions imposed by the company over the territory; reduction of the amount of water and electricity available in the region, as well as loss of production linked to the extensive breeding of livestock, mainly goats, the cultivation of olive trees, seeds, and forest activity.

Finally, it also must be noted that **the right to information is being violated**: not only is the information given by the company really poor, but such information is out of reach as well, where the people affected by the mining activity cannot have access. Information is only spread in provincial state agencies, having the company the power to act as a controller/supervisor of different aspects of the activity.

Regarding **institutional damages**, the lobby against the glaciers law must be noted, "acquired rights" claimed, and **several cases of violence**: many social and environmental organizations were repressed by the local police and private security officers hired by Barrick, as occurred on February 24, 2011.

For this reason, among the claims made in the accusation, the permanent consultation with the affected people is seen, as well as their active participation in the making of decisions about mining projects; the establishment of suitable mechanisms to ensure unrestricted, free, efficient and simple access of the population to the financial, structural and operative information of the company; the creation of an interdisciplinary team to analyze the environmental impact of mining projects in progress; conducting medical studies that are necessary for determining the etiology and characteristics of the different pathologies presented by the villagers surrounding the mining areas, as well as an integral survey of the glaciers historically located in the ecosystem affected by mining activity, and of per glacial environments that have acted as regulators of the water resources.

For more information please contact:

Facundo Villar // Federico Casiraghi // Hernán Medina
FOCO – Foro Ciudadano de Participación por la Justicia y los Derechos Humanos
Tel. + 54 11 47 72 89 22
Mail: foco@inpade.org.ar