

Open letter from diverse members of the Latin American community living in BC about Latincouver and its ExpoPlaza Latina

Vancouver - Unceded Coast Salish territories.

March 20th, 2014

We are more than 600,000 Latin Americans working and living in Canada. Along with our hopes for a better future for ourselves, our families and our communities, we have brought with us our social and cultural experience. The reasons for our coming here are varied, as are the conditions of our presence. Particularly in BC, several cultural, political, and artistic groups of Latin Americans have worked for decades and greatly contribute to the cultural diversity of our Province.

Recently, Latincouver -and primarily its founder and executive director Paola Murillo- has started a series of conferences dubbed the ExpoPlaza Latina, conceived as “the premier platform for connecting British Columbian and Latin American organizations to business opportunities through high-energy panel discussions, workshops and networking opportunities” in the energy, mining, oil and gas markets of Latin America. ExpoPlaza Latina is targeting “entrepreneurs who are hungry to tap into the potential of a growing Latin American market”, and aims for participants to “obtain the resources to tap into the most stable and rapidly growing Latin American markets,” “fostering growth in trade with the newly formed *Alianza del Pacífico*” and “how BC can leverage existing bilateral free-trade agreements to promote trade and investment opportunities with Alianza regions.”

Even though most resource-extraction projects in Latin America are implemented in traditional territories of indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants and peasants, these communities are rarely invited to be part of the discussions, and clearly Latincouver’s ExpoPlaza Latina seems to continue this tradition of silencing and glossing over the communities’ concerns and resistance to the destruction of their territories for the profit of others. These communities have recently expressed their opposition to projects and investment such as the ones Latincouver promotes in an open letter from mining-affected communities in Mexico sent to Stephen Harper in February of 2014²; as well as in the complaint over the Mining Law that Guatemalan indigenous organizations filed with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights³; and in the ongoing campaigns of social and community organizations in El Salvador⁴, Costa Rica⁵, Colombia⁶, Ecuador⁷, Peru⁸, Chile⁹ and across the region to protect their land, water and lives.

There are serious allegations, both from Canadian-based and international organizations, that extraction industry companies (oil, gas, logging, and minerals) have in many cases been associated with forced displacement, land expropriation, human rights violations, weakening of local governance systems, destruction of the environment and food sovereignty systems, pollution of water, precarious employment contracts, and violent actions of armed groups against inhabitants where these companies have interests¹⁰.

¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/29/pacific-alliance-latin-america_n_3353157.html

² <http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/miningwatch/2014/02/dear-mr-harper-open-letter-mining-affected-communities-mexico>

³ http://indigenouspeoplesissues.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=18126:guatemala-guatemalan-indigenous-organizations-file-complaint-over-mining-law-with-inter-american-commission-on-human-rights&catid=30&Itemid=63

⁴ <http://www.miningwatch.ca/article/preliminary-report-gold-mining-and-defence-water-el-salvador>

⁵ <http://www.miningwatch.ca/news/canadian-organizations-condemn-gold-company-s-lawsuit-against-costa-rica>

⁶ <http://www.pasc.ca/en/article/report-profiting-repression-canadian-investment-and-trade-colombia>

⁷ <http://miningwatch.ca/news/canadian-and-chinese-owned-mining-concessions-ecuador-illegal-report>

⁸ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-19669760>

⁹ <http://minesandcommunities.org/article.php?a=9163>

¹⁰ See

http://www.thestar.com/news/world/2013/05/05/canadian_mining_company_got_embassy_help_amid_controversy_in_mexico_adv

As Latin Americans living in Canada we recognize that we are part of a small group of so-called developed nations, and acknowledge the ongoing colonial policies that these nations continue to exert on our communities, especially on indigenous peoples. We recognize these colonial legacies are still being practiced, now through international and Latin American government officials and private companies who contribute to the imposition of economic development models such as bilateral and international trade agreements, military interventions, the International Monetary Fund, G8, World Bank, etc.

While we recognize sectors in our countries certainly are part of these processes and benefit from these practices -benefits that are often at the expense of communities and land- we are still proud of who we are, and do not forget where we come from. This is why we express our indignation and disagreement with Latincouver's ExpoPlaza Latina. First, Latincouver misrepresents and harms Latin American communities by offering a platform for Canadian-based companies to exploit the resources in the region without considering their voices. Second, Latincouver's ExpoPlaza Latina pursues an agenda aligned only to Canadian and local elites' interests.

Latincouver also co-opts the efforts of Latin Americans in Canada who are supporting those marginalized voices by presenting itself as “the leading social, culture network and business portal for the Latin American communities in Metro Vancouver” and claiming to be “bringing all the different Latin American communities together into one another to have our Latin American cultural and business physical Plaza in Vancouver.”

In response to this, we invite the Latin American communities in BC and Canada, as well as friends and allies, to raise their voices in opposition to opportunists like Latincouver. We also invite the community to support the following initiatives: a demo at ExpoPlaza Latina¹¹; to establish a network of groups, organizations and individuals to support the many activities and events organized in BC in true support of Latin American communities; and to help organize a Latin American assembly this fall to discuss issues concerning the Latin American communities of BC.

Signed by:

With support of:

ocacy_group.html for information of the murder of activist Mariano Abarca in Chiapas, Mexico, who was organizing against Calgary-based Blackfire Explorations; see <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/HumanRightsDefendersInMexico.aspx> for a full report of the situation of Human Rights defenders in Mexico, including anti-mining activists Ismael Solorio Urrutia and his wife Manuela Martha Solis, murdered in Chihuahua; see http://www.democracynow.org/2009/12/29/anti_mining_activists_killed_in_el for a report of the murder of Dora “Alicia” Recinos Sorto, who was an active member of the Cabañas Environment Committee, which has campaigned against the reopening of a gold mine owned by Canadian Pacific Rim Mining Corp.; see <http://ncronline.org/news/global/colombian-gold-mining-village-fights-stay-put> for a report of Father José Reinol Restrepo's murder, who was campaigning with the community of Marmato, Colombia against Canadian-registered Gran Colombia Gold; see <http://www.lasc.ie/content/death-environmental-activist-colombia> for a report of the murder of Cesar Garcia, in Cajamarca, Colombia, who was organizing against AngloGoldAshanti; see <http://www.theragblog.com/deadly-environment-latin-american-anti-mining-activists-murdered/> for a report of the murder of El Salvador organizer Marcelo Rivera, who was organizing against Canadian Pacific Rim Mining Corp.

¹¹ As per Latincouver's website ExpoPlaza Latina was postponed on March 17 of 2014. See <http://www.mynewsletterbuilder.com/email/newsletter/1412008979>