



# INTERNATIONAL WOMEN AND MINING NETWORK

## Red Internacional "Mujeres y Minería"

### Newsletter

Issue4, 2008

#### RIMM Coordination Offices

##### International Secretariat and Indigenous People

Coordinator: Bhanumathi K  
Samata  
Dhaatri Resource Centre for Women and Children  
D.No. 14-40-1, Krishna Vihar, Gokhale Road,  
Maharanipeta  
Visakhapatnam – 530002  
Andhra Pradesh, India  
Telfax: +91-891-2737662, 2504013  
Email: [rimmrighs@gmail.com](mailto:rimmrighs@gmail.com)

##### Asia:

Innabuyog  
#16 Loro St., Dizon Subdivision  
Baguio City  
Philippines  
Ph: +63 74 442-5347  
Fax: +63 74 444 3362  
Email: [cwerc@mozcom.com](mailto:cwerc@mozcom.com)  
Website: [www.cpaphils.org](http://www.cpaphils.org)

##### North America:

69 Randolph Street # 3, Arlington Province, MA,  
USA. Tel # 617 273 0349  
Email: [sunita@groundwork-usa.org](mailto:sunita@groundwork-usa.org)

##### Africa:

Wassa Association of Communities Affected by  
Mining (WACAM)

-Tarkwa Office  
P O Box 558, Tarkwa, Ghana  
Tel: +233 – (0)362 – 20137

-Tema Office  
P.O Box CO1816, Tema, Ghana  
Tel: +233-(0)22-200585

Email: [kowus75@yahoo.com](mailto:kowus75@yahoo.com)

Website: [www.wacam.org](http://www.wacam.org)

##### Latin America:

Centro de Promocion Minera  
(CEPROMIN)  
Av Ecuador 2498, Lopaz  
Bolivia  
Tel: +591-22420480  
Email: [elsvh@unete.com](mailto:elsvh@unete.com)

##### Pacific:

Contact Person: Christina Hill  
Extractive Industries Advocacy Officer  
Oxfam Australia  
132 Leicester St  
Carlton Vic 3053  
[www.oxfam.org.au](http://www.oxfam.org.au)  
Tel: +61 3 9289 9311  
Fax: +61 3 9347 1495

---

(Should any of our members find information on campaigns that is inaccurate we apologize for the same and request you to write to us with the corrections)

<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>Pg no</b>
Editorial	2
Exploited and Exposed	3
Campaigns	4
Indigenous People Intimidated	7
KI campaign	7
My job is to preserve the land: Cecilia	8
Jailing of aboriginal leaders may set back resolution to mining dispute: Fontaine	9
Chingari Award for Mukta	9
UN Agreements & Reporting Dates	10
Books And Papers On Mining	11
Archives	12

## EDITORIAL

*Today we see indigenous women taking the lead in standing up for their lands and communities as national governments and transnational mining corporates are unashamedly discharging their duties of plunder. It is shameless not only for the grabbing of their resources, but also for the insidious nature of sensitivity and responsibility projected by corporates and States. The battles of Cecilia and Mukta, who represent the anger of their indigenous sisters, against the mining companies, are for their basic right over their lands, their resources, their ancestral livelihoods and dignity. There is a battle against State and corporate terrorism, for the right to life, food and peaceful living of their communities. In sharp contrast to their demands are the social welfare gestures of mining corporates as evident in the nature of 'gender' promoting events sponsored by them in the form of beauty pageants and wishy-washy women welfare activities to demonstrate the 'hot side of the work' and find the 'best way to cheer mineworkers'. This is the neo-patriarchal feudalism and outrageous rhetoric of gender policies of the mining conglomerates that we, as an international network, strongly condemn.*

---

## Exploited and Exposed

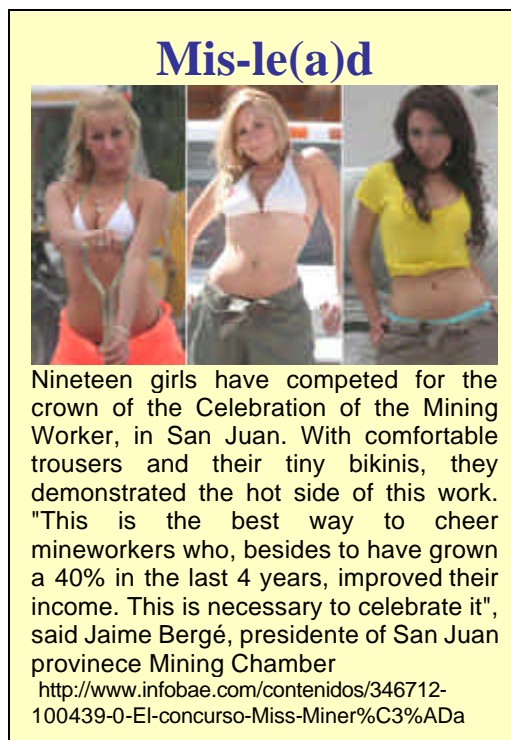
The Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, John Ruggie, has just brought out a multi-stake holder policy framework on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises on three core principles of “the State duty to protect against human rights abuses by third parties, including business; the corporate responsibility to respect human rights; and the need for more effective access to remedies”. The framework evolved from more than 300 reports on alleged corporate related human rights abuses. While the framework suggests legally and non-legally binding mechanisms of bringing corporate accountability by States that are bending their social and environmental responsibilities to attract foreign investments, it also directs corporates to adhere to international and national standards, laws and cultures while respecting basic human rights principles through proactive corporate responsible measures.

However, the crux of the problem lies in the definition of corporate social responsibility as a way of deviating from corporate accountability. Hence, the Special Representative stresses, “while corporations may be considered “organs of society”, they are specialized economic organs, not democratic public interest institutions”. The report also states how

transnational corporations are equipped to take host States to binding international arbitration, the legal framework for regulating transnational companies remains much the same prior to the process of globalisation, implying that corporates escape with a very limited list of social and environmental responsibilities on their part. These are conclusions drawn from more than 2,500 bilateral investment treaties currently in effect.

While on one hand, the framework specifies the respect for a list of human rights concerns by transnational corporations, the outright rejection or violation of these concerns both by corporations and by States (roles of which are increasingly becoming impossible to differentiate given the corporatisation of governance) more so with regard to women and children is a case that needs serious global attention.

Though Mining corporates profess to take on roles and hearts of charitable institutions, their ways of addressing women’s issues is bordering, at times, on crass manifestations of ‘responsibility’. The framework calls for a mandatory human rights and social policy from corporations. However, a cursory look shows that most companies do not have these in place and those that do, show a host of generalised and highly chivalrous



---

policy statements that outrightly ignore them on the ground. Besides, most social policy statements are directed towards the welfare of their direct employees (mostly male) and responsibility to communities, especially women, fades into blurred commitments, or none at all.

The plethora of charitable foundations set up by mining corporations, especially in the developing countries, where their stakes are hotting up, are a fiasco in social responsibility. As the framework states, “because the responsibility to respect is a baseline expectation, a company cannot compensate for human rights harm by performing good deeds elsewhere”. However, this is exactly what happens with regard to responsibility towards women. We see that while serious human rights violations are committed on women displaced from their life support systems, from their dignity of social and economic existence or women forced to work as bonded or casual labourers under highly vulnerable working conditions at different points of mine extraction or processing, reparations are ridiculously and outrageously exhibited elsewhere.

For example, while aboriginal women in Australia are facing human rights violations by BHP Billiton, welfare

schemes for adivasi women in India are abundantly supported by the same corporate. Sterlite/Vedanta has a host of welfare schemes across India while it severely abuses adivasi women in some other parts of the country. New Mont’s activities in Buyat Bay, Indonesia has impacted women and children’s health seriously through their mine tailings, whereas it’s social policy statement is impeccably convincing to a lay person. While corporates do not show any accountability to the millions of women who get no wages or have no security of work, they are willing to throw lavish beauty pageants for women mine workers as a way of indulgence towards them.

There is more to gender concerns than the crass contests of ‘Miss Lead’ and ‘Miss Gold’. It is this very form of corporate induced violations, added to their existing violations through plunder of community and workers’ rights, that gives little promise of accountability to women whether from States or from corporates, in spite of the sensitive frameworks that exist – since, who is the State and who is the Corporate? Most often they wear the same patriarchal uniforms, with the latter dictating terms to the former.

---

## Campaigns

### Locals protest uranium mining development

28/04/2008

A group of Alice Springs residents have rallied over the weekend against potential uranium mining of the south of town. In a symbolic move about 30 people shared yellow sponge cake and raised concerns about the two uranium deposits, Angela and Pamela, which have been licensed for exploration.

### Homeless Aborigines

April 28, 2008

TWO Aborigines "froze to death" last winter in Kalgoorlie and more will die this year if emergency housing is not built, a local doctor has warned the Federal Government.

### Girl sues mining giant

April 24, 2008 –

A six-year-old Mt Isa girl with brain and nervous system injuries allegedly linked to

---

lead exposure has launched legal action against mining giant Xstrata. Stella Hare has lived in Mount Isa with her mother since June 2002. The claim alleges that Mount Isa Mines (MIM) has negligently caused the contamination of large areas of the community with lead and other toxic elements for at least the past 20 years. The claim also alleges that Queensland Health has been aware of the problem since at least 1990 when tests revealed significant contamination by lead, cadmium and arsenic at various sites in Mount Isa. Law firm Slater & Gordon has served a notice of claim on Xstrata, its subsidiary Mount Isa Mines Ltd, Mount Isa City Council and the Queensland government. The lawsuit comes just a day after Xstrata chief executive Charlie Sartain said the mining company was a good corporate citizen and had long worked with health and environmental authorities to manage lead levels in the Mount Isa community. Queensland Health will next month release to the community a report into the blood lead levels of 403 children aged between one and four years. The report is expected to show that 45 of the children tested had lead levels above the World Health Organisation recommended level of 10 micrograms per decilitre. AAP

#### **Tight security for mining firms in Mindanao**

INQUIRER.net 04/17/2008

MANILA, Philippines -- President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo ordered the military to secure mining companies in the southern Philippine region of Caraga, noting that these companies are "big temptations to terrorists." Arroyo said in an interview in Siargao late Wednesday, *Mark Ching, contributor*

#### **Indigenous mining share deal**

1/04/08

MORE than 2,500 of the country's most disadvantaged Aborigines will become

shareholders in an Australian Securities Exchange-listed mining company under an innovative native title agreement. The Martu people, traditional owners of a swathe of Western Australia's western desert, have thrashed out a deal with Reward Minerals Ltd allowing the company to mine potash at Lake Disappointment. The Martu live at the four remote communities of Parnngurr, Punmu, Jigalong and Kunawarritji, more than 1000 kilometres from Perth. They were awarded native title over 136,000 square kilometres of land in 2003.

#### **Philippine Indigenous Leaders plea to UN to protect their sacred sites**

Press Release on behalf of Task Force Canatuan Subanon Timuay (traditional leaders) Jose Anoy and Fernando Mudai travelled from Mindanao in the Southern Philippines to Geneva, Switzerland, to protest the serious violations of the Subanon Peoples' rights to the UN Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (UN CERD). The Timuays were in Geneva to follow up their earlier submission, filed in July 2007, and were keen to highlight the complete failure of the Philippine Government in its response to the UN CERD questions on their previous submission.

*For more information contact: Geoff Nettleton, PIPLinks phone +44 (0)207 326 0363, or +44 (0)1367 718889 email [info@piplinks.org](mailto:info@piplinks.org)*

#### **Peru gives Rio Tinto mining rights at the border**

Mar 26, 2008

LIMA, March 26 (Reuters) - Peru said on Wednesday it granted mining rights to mining giant Rio Tinto in 18 lots in the southern region of Tacna, less than 30 miles from Peru's border with Chile and Bolivia.

*<http://www.reuters.com/article/marketsNews/idUSN2627966620080326>*

---

### **Rio, Curtin ink \$10m R&D deal**

RIO Tinto has ramped up its push to automate its mining operations, committing \$10.5 million to develop a mining research and development centre with Western Australia's Curtin University.  
<http://www.australianit.news.com.au/story/0,24897,23362120-15321,00.html>

### **Mining Clash in Congo Leaves 1 Dead**

11/03/08

KINSHASA, Congo (AP) — An attempt by police to evict hundreds of people mining without permission on government property in southern Congo turned into a clash that killed a child who was caught in the crossfire. A stray bullet hit a 10-year-old boy who was returning home from school in Likasi, a town in Congo.

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5i5HB020WunfPWM51SE8LqYiygsRgD8V80O580>

### **Villagers protest uranium mining**

March 1, 2008

ANCHORAGE, Alaska – Some people used all of the attention at the ceremonial start of the Iditarod to draw attention to concerns over a mining project near an Iditarod checkpoint. Two companies, Triex Minerals Corp. and Full Metal Minerals Ltd. are gearing up for drilling this summer. Contact Angela Blanchard at [ablanchard@ktuu.com](mailto:ablanchard@ktuu.com)

### **Brazilian landless workers vandalize iron plant of mining giant Vale**

March 8, 2008

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil: Protesters from the Landless Rural Workers Movement invaded a pig iron plant in northeastern Brazil belonging to Brazilian mining giant Vale.

<http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/03/08/business/LA-FIN-Brazil-Vale.php>

### **\$125,000 boost to help stop violence EMMA SWAIN**

A Hunter Valley coal mining company has pledged a \$125,000 funding boost to help Maitland's women and children, who flee domestic violence and avoid the poverty cycle. Xstrata Coal NSW has presented Maitland refuge Carrie's Place with the large corporate sponsorship cheque to enable the service to employ the Hunter's first full-time domestic violence counsellor and also create two part-time positions.

<http://maitland.yourguide.com.au/news/local/general/125000-boost-to->

### **Miningwatch Canada**

\*Goro-Nickel returned to visit the Isle of Ouen to once again ask for permission to lay its pipe. The population was gathered and the unanimous answer was negative.

\*500 people congregated close to the south provincial government in Noumea to protest against the corruption that has led to the construction of the Goro Nickel plant and to support indigenous people.  
<http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=K4W29sk2M3g>

\* The French central government had launched a court action to attempt to revoke the provincial government's imposition of "rent" on Inco's pipe.

\*Indigenous people of the Yaté region and Isle of Ouen met to discuss the possibility of Inco, attempting to resume work on pipe laying

### **Army patrol attacked**

The recently formed Freedom for Kanaky group has attacked an army patrol. Indigenous people are trying to reclaim land taken by Inco in its attempts to build a hydrometallurgical plant in the Yaté region. The Freedom for Kanaky group ambushed an army truck and attacked the occupants.

---

## Indigenous People Intimidated

The Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) of the Binongan indigenous peoples in Baay-Licuan, Abra Philippines, was grossly violated by the Canadian mining company Olympus Pacific by not securing it prior to exploration and drilling in the indigenous peoples' ancestral domain at Capcapo mountain. Now, the communities opposing Olympus are militarized with the presence of the 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Battalion of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Olympus and its local conduits AMIC and Jabel continued the exploration despite petitions filed by the communities as early as March 2007

Olympus only stopped its operations in August 2007 when the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP)-CAR told them to defer all exploration activities. Also, there was no FPIC process conducted with the communities, as they had no prior knowledge that there was a Mineral Production Sharing Agreement (MPSA) approved and issued to the local subsidiaries in April 1998.

The affected communities are stepping up their opposition with the continuing submission of petitions since March 2007 to the NCIP regional and provincial offices and local government units. As a result of the community complaints, Olympus is now making haste to comply with the FPIC requirements through consultations with the concerned barangays from April 1-19, 2008 as militarization intensifies in the communities. In Poblacion for instance, the

Bravo and Charlie companies of the 41<sup>st</sup> IB have camped right under the houses of residents, sowing fear and terror in the community and putting at risk the security and safety of the communities. They have maliciously tagged members of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance and its provincial chapter, KASTAN-CPA Abra and the host community for Cordillera Day 2008 BALITOK, who are in Baay-Licuan for Cordillera Day 2008 ground preparations, as members of the New People's Army (NPA). Branding these organizations and community leaders as NPAs, it put them as open targets and enemies of the state, thereby giving the AFP license to attack and violate the rights of civilians and communities. BALITOK (Baay Licuan Takderan Omnu a Karbengan) is locally hosting Cordillera Day 2008, aptly themed *Resist Mining Plunder and State Terrorism*. Baay Licuan is composed of 11 barangays. It is part of the ancestral domain of the Binongan IPs in Abra. The indigenous communities have taken care of and developed the land. Olympus' operations will permanently destroy these including the lives of generations it has sustained.

The public is requested to extend support to the indigenous peoples of Baay-Licuan in their fight to protect their land and resources. The Philippine government must uphold the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, of which it is a signatory.

## KI campaign

Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI) is a small, remote, First Nation in Northern Ontario that was sued early last year by [Platinex](#), a Toronto-based junior mining exploration company, [for \\$10 Billion dollars](#). Platinex also sought out an injunction against KI so they could drill for platinum on their Traditional Territory without the

community's permission. In turn, KI submitted a counter-injunction...

In what was widely regarded a landmark decision, [an Ontario Superior Court Judge ruled in favour of KI](#) a few months later, ordering a moratorium on mining while the company and the provincial government hold

---

talks with them. The Judge also went far beyond the familiar mandate of the courts, by stating in his ruling, “the relationship that aboriginal peoples have with the land cannot be understated;” that “the land is the very essence of their being. It is their very heart and soul. No amount of money can compensate for its loss.”

The Judge added, “Despite repeated judicial messages delivered over the course of 16 years, the evidentiary record available in this case sadly reveals that the provincial Crown has not heard or comprehended this message and has failed in fulfilling [their] obligation [to consult the People].”

The ruling was [whole-heartedly welcomed](#) by the KI, even though the court proceedings bankrupted them. Since then, there has been an ongoing ‘consultation’ process. However on September 24, Kitchenuhmaykoosib leaders escorted Platinex officials back to their plane and warned that they may file trespassing charges against them. The reason for this is that Platinex was overtly ignoring the KI dependency on the land for survival—and was assuming the mining operation was ‘a given’. In any event, immediately after this,

the junior mining company went to the Ontario Courts stating KI had no right to block their access to the land. [One month later](#), the Court made it’s ruling—stating that not only is Platinex allowed access to the Territory, but that they can now commence drilling.

According to a schedule sent out last week, Platinex is set to begin Phase One of it’s drilling operation anytime after November 2. It is set to last until July 2008.

On November 2, the Indigenous Nation issued a Press Release warning that Platinex is not welcome in their community, and that any actions beyond customary practices on their Territory are not sanctioned or permitted. “If you choose to proceed anyway,” they explained, “the membership of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwig will consider this as an encroachment and your advance will be met with objection.” By all means Platinex is going to proceed, and right now it’s too early to tell how KIFN is going to respond—but we can be pretty much certain it’s not going to involve the courts this time.

### My job is to preserve the land: Cecilia



“I am fighting for what I believe is ours: our rights, our land, for future generations. It’s not about me, it’s about the people back home,” says political prisoner Ms Cecilia Begg Jon Thompson, in an interview at the Kenora jail.

She is the Head Councilor of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwig (KI) First Nation in Northern Ontario, what has come to be known as the KI6, a group serving six months for contempt after blockading a mining company from its licensed operations on disputed land near their community. Cecilia fears that her community itself will undergo drastic changes if the Platinex mine

were to go ahead and apprehends the animals; traditions and the culture of her people will be endangered

The mobilization around her political struggle has been attributed to her being a woman. She makes no bones about it, stating that in her community it’s important to show respect to the females as they are the ones who are mothers, grandmothers, great grandmothers, elders. They play an important role.

She refused to accept any special favours granted to her for being a woman.

She ruled out chances of reconciliation and agreement with the company, asserting that she was not for or against development as there was too much at stake. Her community

---

is to be readied for the change, she feels. Stating that it is for the future generations and leaders to take a call on the development

process, she says her job is just to preserve the land for them.

### **Jailing of aboriginal leaders may set back resolution to mining dispute: Fontaine**

TORONTO — The incarceration of six Northern Ontario aboriginal leaders as part of a dispute with an exploration company poses a serious impediment to any fair resolution, Assembly of First Nations Chief Phil Fontaine said following a jailhouse visit.

Still, Fontaine said he was "encouraged" by a recent meeting with Ontario Aboriginal Affairs Minister Michael Bryant who seemed committed to moving forward on a number of issues. "There's three important matters that the province has committed itself to," Fontaine said, noting they include resource revenue sharing with First Nations, adhering to their duty to consult and accommodate on matters that relate to aboriginal land and moving forward with an interim plan.

Fontaine affirmed the leaders from the Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI) First Nation near Thunder Bay are not opposed to development. What the group does oppose is the way in which the deal was managed by both the Ontario government and the mining company, Platinex Inc., he said. "Platinex because they ignored the rights and interests of this community's traditional lands and the provincial government's decision to issue the permit to allow exploration to take place without regard to their legal duty to consultation and accommodation," he said.

"They're very determined to stand firm on this very principled position they've taken to say no to development at this stage."

Fontaine said even grandmother of seven Cecilia Begg seemed quite prepared to serve her sentence rather than back down.

"They believe their position is right and of course we agree with them," he said, noting they are exploring the possibility of an appeal," he said.

"We've had this very, very unfortunate action on the part of the courts for a judge to hand down this very harsh, unfair sentence and what this sentence is telling us is that economic interest will trump the rights of indigenous peoples every time."

"That's just the wrong, wrong message that needs to be conveyed," he added.

In television interview, Bryant said he agrees with Fontaine that the group should never have been sent to jail. Most progressive mining companies, he said, have entered into agreements with First Nations that have resulted in jobs, revenue and an increased standard of living. "I have been up to KI three times in the last few months... to try and broker something," he said. "The company got off to a terrible start... This is not the way it's supposed to happen." Admitting some First Nations communities have stopped working with the government in protest, Bryant said it's important to "keep working towards finding a resolution."

[http://canadianpress.google.com/article/ALeqM5jcnXmboWovpd\\_DhyPFh4p30Q](http://canadianpress.google.com/article/ALeqM5jcnXmboWovpd_DhyPFh4p30Q)

### **Chingari Award for Mukta**

"I will not leave my motherland and will not let the company take over," said Mukta, locking horns with the mining consortium that tried to evict her

community from its bauxite-rich plateaus. She vowed to protect the fragile ecology.

She was as good as her word and earned herself a well deserved and the very first

Chingari award. The award has served as a shot in the arm for the tribal people's struggle against mining giants in Orissa.

Forty-five-year-old Mukta Jodia, a tribal from Kashipur in Orissa, waged a 14-year-old struggle against the Hindalco-led Utkal Alumina's bauxite mining project, inspiring and mobilizing her community. A fiery speaker, she has relentlessly traveled to tribal villages, often on bicycle with her husband or son, informing them about the company's plans to exploit their land.

In December 2000, the Orissa police shot dead three tribal men who were part of a gathering to protest Government plans to hold a pro-mining meeting in their village. Mukta was among the women leaders who stayed behind braving the violence to drive the police away and

reclaim the bodies of their dead brethren. Mukta has been a central figure in resisting the damming of Khandani Kharak river for supplying water to the alumina plant. Besides the mining struggles, she has also worked with other villagers to reclaim illegally acquired land from big landlords and distribute it among adivasi farmers.

### The Award



The Chingari Award for Women Against Corporate Crime was set up by Rashida Bee and Champa Devi Shukla from the Goldman Prize (also known as Alternate Nobel Prize for Environment) money

that they won in 2004. The Chingari Trust and Awards are an all-women affair. Chingari trustees, members of the awards jury and the award winners are all women.

Source: [www.chingaritrust.org](http://www.chingaritrust.org)

## UN Agreements & Reporting Dates

Here is the list of the dates of UN conventions and the last date reporting dates set for the taskforces to submit their reports:

Country	Reporting date
<b>CAT</b>	
Belgium	Nov 2008
<b>CEDAW &amp; OP</b>	
Burma	Oct. 2008
Ecuador	Oct. 2008
Mongolia	Oct. 2008
Canada	Oct. 2008
Kyrgyz Republic	Oct. 2008
UK	June/July 2008
<b>CERD</b>	
Ecuador	July/Aug 2008
<b>CRC</b>	
Sierra Leone	May/June 2008
United Kingdom	Sept/Oct 2008
<b>ICCPR</b>	
Australia	Oct. 2008

United Kingdom	July 2008
<b>ICECSR</b>	
Nicaragua	Nov. 2008
Philippines	Nov. 2008
<b>UPR (Universal Periodic Review)</b>	
Colombia	Session 3: Dec. 2008

*It is preferable if your org's shadow report can be provided to each member of the given convention's committee approx. 3 months prior to the session*

*\*\*UPR submissions (max. 5pg document) need to be sent to [UPRsubmissions@ohchr.org](mailto:UPRsubmissions@ohchr.org) approx. 3 months prior to the session. See [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/upr/noteNGO\\_041007.htm](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/upr/noteNGO_041007.htm) for deadlines and more info.*

---

## Books and Papers on Mining



### **Rich Lands, Poor People. Is Sustainable Mining Possible?**

State of India's Environment: A Citizens Report  
Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi  
Pages: 356

Price: Paperback- Rs.490/- or US\$ 40;  
Hardback-Rs. 790/- or US\$ 50; ebook (pdf)-  
Rs 450/- or US\$ 28

This edition of the State of Environment illustrates the immense challenges facing the mining sector in India. It assesses the sector's efficacy in promoting 'growth' in mineral-rich areas, while scrutinising government initiatives in implementing regulations, and documents the response of civil society in different parts of the country.

Source: [www.cseindia.org](http://www.cseindia.org)

### **The Invisible Work of Women in the Small Mines of Bolivia**

*By Els Van Hoecke*

This paper by Els van Hoecke gives a vivid first hand narration of the life of women miners called palliries, in Bolivia. It gives a detailed account of the present mining scenario and the changing models of relationships in the mining sector between mine enterprises and communities. In the fresh hope of re-opening of cooperatives and new small mines, the palliris are working tirelessly sometimes, as the sole breadwinners of their families. With technology an inaccessible dream, the women work manually through heavy metals and stones, 'working like ants' and perform the lowest scale of activities. Without any technical guidance, they acquire knowledge and skills of extraction and technical processes through experience and from their elders as women start mine labour activities at a very young age, almost as minors.

There are different types of jobs that women perform in the mining industry with specific terminologies to address these women. The relavera are women who work with hovels to gather tin remnants from contaminated rivers downstream of the mills. The veneritas are women who work in the fields mineralized by alluvial sedimentation, where only the leftovers are for the women. The guardas watch over the cooperatives' mine entrances. These latter women live 4000 m above sea level, living right there in the mountains in the biting cold with no basic facilities. The juqueadoras are women who work illegally, working in the middle of the night to steal the ore and often enter into prostitution due to their desperate economic situation. The Barranquillas are women who work in the gold mines.

Although women and even children perform equal tasks as men and are exposed to high levels of contamination and toxicity, their work is not recognised and their numbers do not count. Hence the invisibility of their share in the mine labour production in Bolivia. Women suffer from a number of respiratory, muscular-skeletal and nervous disorders. One of the most serious resource problems they face is access to uncontaminated water and the dream of owning a house.

Mine work is often associated with a sense of loneliness and a loss of identity for women as they have to leave their communities and wander around in search of work. This insecurity spreads across different age groups, especially the youth who are vulnerable to crimes and violence and young girls are highly exploited, physically and sexually. Alcoholism, sexually transmitted diseases and domestic violence plague all mining regions destroying the social fabric.

### **The husbands' allies**

Women organized housewives' committees since 1961, calling themselves 'the husbands' allies'. Four mine workingwomen started the country's return to democracy in 1978 with a hunger strike. During the 'relocalization' process in Bolivia, the women organised themselves as the Mine Housewives' National Committee (CONACMIN), including both nationalized and private mine centres. Initially their objectives of struggle were general and more to support their husbands', but it soon expanded into larger issues of education, sanitation, health care and food. In 1984, the committee organised the First National Conference of Mine Housewives, which also discussed political, social and cultural issues of Bolivia. It was, however, in 1986 at the first General Assembly that the mine housewives' union board was formed. It was in 1991 that the committee got membership with full rights in the National Federation of Mine Workers of Bolivia and the women could write up their by-laws in the unions.

Some of the statements made by women in the union were ..... "Never thought to be a leader was such a difficult task....but not impossible, .....they (the male worker) don't want to give us what we really deserve.....and .....the government does not think of us, we are hungry, we want to eat, we want to live.....". Some of the issues addressed by these women were the dismissals with benefits, the closure of the 'Totoral' mine, the misleading voluntary retirement scheme, the suits against union leaders at Chuquiuhuta and others.

Among some important names in the history of mine working women there is Domitila Chungara, who since the creation of the first housewives committee at the

'Siglo XX' mine district has been a permanent defender of human rights. Another is Norma Salguero, the first chairman of CONACMIN who made history through her strong intervention at mine congresses and assemblies demanding justice and equal participation for mine women and is now assisting the new National Committee of Housewives.

### **The change of women's role under neo-liberal policy of 1985:**

Following the Structural Adjustment Policy, women concentrated on collecting funds for the common pot or for workers' children. The relocalisation, which threw many workers out of jobs, forced women to go out of the home in search of work to feed their families. During this time, 'our *companeras* (fellow women) gave birth and still go to the marches. "we were threatened by the police.....they beat us with sticks from every side.....they brought dogs trying to scare us.....we decided to sit right there and turn our back; we started to cry in desperation and began to sing the national anthem, trying to protect ourselves...but it was as if the dogs guessed, it should not bite us, instead one had bitten a policeman's hand." The palliri women, already organised, who worked for the 'Catavi' mine enterprise where their tools were 'limited to our hands' digging in the muck wrote thus ' maybe someday one may dare to paint all of this in a book which may be titled "Systematic annihilation of women in Bolivia" or "Tears and blood at the Siglo XX mucks"....' Since 1992 FENCOMIN, the national federation of mine cooperatives of Bolivia, has a position at its board of directors called 'Women's Link' but it is headed by a man! Nevertheless, women are gaining space gradually, even though today they have only one representative in

---

the board of directors, the secretary for palliri women's affairs. Regional palliri women workers' associations began to organize less than a decade ago, when the number of workingwomen within the cooperatives increased markedly. In 2003 the national assembly of palliri women participated in the political discussions in Bolivia and demanded for urgent attention to the diseases affecting the cooperatives' female members, for palliris women to be appointed to decision-making and policy making roles and to modify the retirement age for women to 45 years.

In this way, the palliri women and women in cooperatives have been asserting for their spaces in the mining sector's leadership and decision-making roles and to participate in the politics of Bolivia. Through their committees and alliances they are initiating actions to enable women workers have access to tools and better technology, access to information, better education and health conditions for their children and for better incomes for their families. They are working to make mine workingwomen's invisible work visible