An open response by the Latin American Observatory of Mining Conflicts (OCMAL) to the article " Ecuador's Correa Seeks South American Allies in Conflict with Anti-Mining Social Movements ."

On November 23, 2012 the Peruvian news agency *Andina* published an article in which the President of Ecuador stated that his country together with Peru and Colombia should come together to combat opposition to mining. He repeated one of his current slogans: "We can't be beggars seated on a sack of gold."

Perhaps thinking that mining will help his country escape poverty, he attacked those who dare to criticize this extractive industry, standing with the governments of Peru and Colombia.

We recall that several years ago, the persecution, legal action against, and even the death of mining opponents has given rise to the criminalization of social protest in many countries of the south.

It's also fitting to ask how many "alternative" governments have come to power in Latin America. The answer is: through lengthy processes of social protest. It is then at the very least contradictory that these governments criminalize the very mechanisms of social and democratic participation - known as social protest - that put them in government. We believe that the motive for criminalization among these governments is the fear of losing future elections. From our perspective, this does not justify distancing themselves from democratic methods and principles, and to openly abuse human rights.

But there is something even more troubling behind Correa's wishes and announcements. Those who are opposed to mining are not the elite and their allies, but rather indigenous peoples and campesino communities that see their ways of life, their culture, and their means of subsistance

at risk, those who are inextricably dependent on the quantity and quality of water and territory available to them. Mining consumes large quantities of water, which is irreparably contaminated. Mining opposition is not arising, as Correa might think, from abroad. Rather, it is the genuine demand of communities up against an activity considered one of the most risky and destructive on the planet. At the same time, transnational mining is among those that contributes least to the development of countries dependent on extractive industry.

Another disturbing aspect of Correa's announcement is that he will coordinate with neighbouring countries to go after mining opposition. This reminds us of the sinister "Plan Cóndor", a pact between Latin American countries to put down communism and anything that looked anything like it. In the last few years, Latin American governments have been adjusting their legislation to categorize as terrorism marches, demonstrations, the occupation of roads and public buildings, and, ing general, manifestations of social protest. Correa has taken an audacious step: international, coordinated persecution of social protest related to mining opposition.

Will this mean the singling out of those who oppose this activity? An international exchange of some sort of compendium of what has happened to date? The establishment of an alliance of those opposed to anti-mining activists with border control to prevent their entry? Will they be put in the same category as narcotraffickers or members of organizations who defend the use of violence? These are important questions given that the activities of anti-mining activists include the exchange of information, technical and legal support to communities so that they can defend their rights up against powerful mining companies. Non-profit activities, peaceful and without any other objective that to return to communities the rights that have been abused and threatened by extractive industry and governments inclined to carve out sacrifice zones in the interests of a reduced group of national residents and transnational mining companies.

To represent the interests of the transnational mining industry as openly as Correa does doesn't happen everyday. If we look at the strategies that the mining industry has used to try to legitimate what communities call pillage and destruction, they have failed one by one.

Among these, "corporate social responsibility" or CSR, open-door and corporate citizenship policies, the "Mining, Metals and Sustainable Development" initiative (MMSD), and recently the Andean Regional Initiative [a program of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)] that some high profile international NGOs like World Vision are using to impose mining on communities. None of these has diminished social opposition to this extractive industry and even less so, helped it gain legitimacy.

In this context, Correa's proposal is a dream come true for the mining industry: that others will resolve one of its principle problems, which is the lack of social and environmental legitimacy and growing rejection of extractivism.