Public memorial held in Toronto after assassination of teenage activist resisting Goldcorp/Tahoe mines in Guatemala

Over 60 people gathered in front of the Goldcorp office in Toronto on May 5 to commemorate the life of Merilyn Topacio Reynoso Pacheco and to denounce her assassination and the violence around the Goldcorp mines in Guatemala. Photo by Allan Lisver.

By RACHEL SMALL and JOANNE JEFFERSON

Toronto – On May 5, as Goldcorp announced the year’s profits at its annual shareholder meeting in Vancouver, more somber events were happening in Toronto and in Guatemala to hold the company accountable for the murder of 16-year-old mining resistance activist, Merilyn Topacio Reynoso Pacheco.

In Toronto, over 60 people gathered on Adelaide Street in front of Goldcorp’s offices for a memorial to honour Topacio’s life and to denounce the violence and cowardly act that killed her. At the same time, Topacio’s family, friends and community members were gathering in Guatemala to commemorate her activism and leadership, and to demand justice for her death.

Topacio was assassinated by unknown gunmen on April 15 in Mataquescuintla, Jalapa, Guatemala. Her father, Edwin Alexander Reynoso who accompanied her at the time, was also shot and remains in critical condition. Both Topacio and her father were active in the resistance against Canadian company Tahoe Resources’ Escobal mine, in San Rafael las Flores, Santa Rosa. Topacio, since her work as the Youth Coordinator of the Resistance to the Escobal mine, in Santa Rosa, was also a poet and musician.

Canadian company Goldcorp owns 69% of the Escobal mining project which Topacio and her family have been resisting in defense of their Liberty, their homes, and their right to prior consultation, self-determination and human rights. At her funeral, Topacio’s mother promised: “The resistance doesn’t die. The resistance continues.”

The Mines Justice Solidarity Network says that Canadians can honour Topacio’s life and her mother’s promise by denouncing Goldcorp for their responsibility in this act of violence, and by opposing the violations of human rights and environmental rights that have faced since the mine opened in their region.

Attendees heard some of Topacio’s poetry, her favourite music, and speakers who read messages of solidarity and a commitment to continue to support this struggle. Candles, flowers, and a large painted banner that read “Rest in Power, Topacio” filled the busy downtown corner where people gathered for the ceremony, anger, and determination, as well as a moment of silence.

As the memorial was taking place, 36 international human rights, environmental justice, and solidarity organizations delivered a letter to Goldcorp’s Attorney General, Claudia Vey R., in protest of the attacks against Alex and Topacio Reynoso. “We condemn these attacks and we are calling on the Goldcorp to conduct a full and impartial investigation to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice,” the letter states.

The letter also identifies other incidents of violence and injustice that have occurred in communities surrounding the mine, such as the recent police violence against a peaceful protest about Goldcorp’s mines.

Rachel Small is a poet, environmental justice activist and organizer with the Mining Justice Solidarity Network (MSN) in Toronto. Joanna Jefferson is a writer and facilitator from Nova Scotia and has been a long-time community member who recently spent a month in Guatemala visiting communities impacted by Canadian-owned mines.

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