

GRUPO DE LOS CIEN INTERNACIONAL / GROUP OF 100

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WRITERS AND ARTISTS ASK MEXICO'S PRESIDENT TO CANCEL MINING CONCESSIONS IN THE SACRED TERRITORY OF THE HUICHOL PEOPLE

Mexico may be the world's largest silver producing country, but not all that shines is silver, countries also shine in their myths and rites, their traditions and culture, and the Huichol (or Wixáritari, in their own language) have shone in Mexico and the world by preserving their unique spiritual identity over time. The annual pilgrimage made by the Wixáritari across the sacred desert landscape of Wirikuta to Cerro Quemado, the mountain where they believe the sun was born, is internationally famous.

In November 2009 the Canadian mining company First Majestic Silver bought 22 mining concessions in the Real de Catorce area, in the state of San Luis Potosi. These concessions will allow First Majestic Silver to carry out what the company describes as "an aggressive drilling and exploration program" on 6,327 hectares of land.

The problem is that this part of San Luis Potosi is in the middle of the Wirikuta Natural Reserve. For centuries Huichol men, women and children have made their way here from communities in the western Sierra Madre mountains in the states of Jalisco, Nayarit, Durango and Zacatecas to carry out their religious ceremonies, accompanied and guided by the mara'akate, their shaman-priests.

Handing over the sacred territory of the Huichols to First Majestic Silver to be mined for its own financial gain not only betrays the colonial mentality of the politicians and bureaucrats responsible for selling silver, Mexico's most emblematic mineral resource, to foreign companies but, far worse, will entail the desecration of the ancestral lands of the Wixáritari.

First Majestic Silver operates exclusively in Mexico, at its La Parrilla, San Martin and La Encantada mines, and expects to produce seven and a half million ounces of silver in Mexico during 2011.

Minera Golodrina, a Mexican subsidiary of the Canadian-based multinational Lake Shore Gold Corp, plans to dig an open-pit gold mine in the sacrosanct core zone of the

Wirikuta Reserve, extracting gold using the highly toxic cyanide process. Both mining operations would endanger the scarce local water supply.

When many people speak of a Mexico that is greater and more enduring than the current climate of violence, they are thinking of its history and culture, and mention of Wirikuta brings to mind an ethnic group which is profoundly Mexican and respected the world over for its authenticity and creativity, whereas mention of First Majestic Silver and Lake Shore Gold Corp brings to mind rapacity and colonialism.

We ask President Felipe Calderón --- who witnessed the signing of the Huaxa Manaka Pact three years ago by the governors of five states who vowed to preserve the sacred territory of the Wixárika people --- to cancel the mining concessions granted to both Canadian companies. We hope that President Calderón will not go down in history as the man who authorized the destruction of Wirikuta and its holy ceremonial sites.

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