

# Grupo Cajolá

## Monthly Update: March 2010



*"Let's walk together so  
that no one is left behind."*

### GRUPO CAJOLÁ

**Ramapo Students Visit Cajolá** — in the third annual visit by Ramapo students, this year's group made a huge impression. Seven young women along with their two professors tackled digging a well in front of the Health Center. The project prompted appropriate questions about how a town of 17,000 could have a health center without water — but the community's general amazement at the work of "mujercitas" will leave as lasting results as the hoped-for water. (We didn't reach water yet, but Grupo Cajolá will continue the search.)

**Building a Better Cajolá** — with continuing resistance by the mayor and his council to the community's requests for more information about where the 13 million quetzals (\$1.6 million) received to date from the central government as well as specific information regarding the renovation of the central park, the community held an open town meeting where the community could directly question the mayor. The community gave the mayor and his council 10 days to respond. Stay tuned.

**Radio Program** — we stopped our weekly broadcast under pressure to stop talking about community issues such as the corruption in RENAP (see our February issue).

**Egg Farm of Cajolá** — wow, the productivity finally recovered, in Chicken Coop #1 the women achieved 85% productivity for the first time in a year. It is time to sell the hens from Coop #2 and new hens will arrive before the end of the month.

**MayaMam Weavers** — thank you to our tireless volunteer Leigh, you can follow us on Facebook and on Twitter! In Cajolá, the group implemented an inventory control system for their yarn. After some brainstorming on their objectives for the coming year, the weavers have begun to work on developing new fabrics. You can find our pillows and headbands in *ArtsEcho Gallery* in Union City, our coffee with gift bags and our towels at *Ramapo Bookstore*, and our woven belts and Santa Anita Coffee in *Bridges* in Denville.

**Talent Tree/Cajolá Carpentry** — the men started construction of their workshop and began looking for the tools and equipment they will be needing to start up this new business. We are **looking for some funding** for the startup as well.

**DESGUA** — we hosted a group of students from U. Tucson invited by DESGUA to know the work of Grupo Cajolá in Cajolá.

**Reformed Church of Highland Park** — we were pleased to be invited to speak about our work to this congregation that so strongly supports social justice.

**Ramapo College** — we spoke on the Maya and the Nation State in Professor Doerr's World Anthropology Class.

"**What to do if you end up in jail or deportation**" was the

### CHJONTE TO RAMAPO COLLEGE!

*We would like to say special thanks to all of Ramapo college and especially to the Alternate Break students for their tangible response to the needs of all of the students of Cajolá, especially our middle school INEB, with their donation of notebooks, pencils, pens, & other assorted school supplies. We are also very grateful for the donation of \$300 towards our project to supply water to Cajolá's Health Center.*

### PLEASE HELP!

**Scholarships** — we are supporting 10 high school students and two university students in 2010. A high school scholarship costs \$774 per year and university costs \$1340. **We still need \$2060.**

**For tax-deductible financial contributions:**

*For scholarships: please make checks payable to **Maya Educational Foundation***

*For all other donations: please make checks payable to **PeaceWorks/Grupo Cajolá**. PeaceWorks website can accept electronic donations to Grupo Cajolá as well. Go to [www.grupocajola.org](http://www.grupocajola.org) Donate and click on the link to PeaceWorks website. Thank you Jim Burchell.*

*Please mail your contributions to Grupo Cajolá, 50 Cutler St, Morristown, NJ 07960*

***Gracias!***

topic of a talk given to Morristown immigrants. With the on-going and increasing repression and discrimination against immigrants, the need to understand how the system works and what are their rights are important themes. It appears that ICE arrives daily in Morris County's jail to put whoever has arrived on immigration hold, regardless of whether a crime has been committed, so understanding rights especially access to lawyers is very important.

**Seton Hall University** — we participated in a panel on careers in non-profits.

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## BACKGROUND: MINING & COMMUNITY RESISTANCE

Adapted from NISGUA's April 2008 article "Toxic Gold"

### "NO TO MINING, YES TO LIFE!"

This is the latest shout heard throughout rural Guatemala, in response to the almost 400 mining concessions that have been granted to transnational gold, silver, nickel, and zinc mining companies over the last several years.

Upon the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996, the Guatemalan government passed a series of neoliberal economic reforms under the pretext of jumpstarting the national economy after decades of war. These reforms -- including the national mining law, the foreign investment law, and the ratification of the Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) with the U.S. -- have all but eliminated the possibility for locally-driven economic development solutions in favor of "trickle-down" foreign investment. As a result, a slew of mega-"development" projects have penetrated the country, exacerbating unequal land distribution, harming the environment and agriculture, and undermining local democracy and basic human rights. One of these projects is the Marlin Mine, a massive gold and silver open-pit mine located in the department of San Marcos.

The Marlin Mine is a project of Canadian and U.S. mining giant Goldcorp, which became the 3rd largest mining company in the world after merging with the U.S.-owned Glamis Gold last year. Goldcorp began constructing the mine in 2004 with a \$45 million dollar loan from the World Bank.

Who loses and who gains in the global exploitation of natural resources? In the case of San Marcos, the answer is clear. Ian Telfer, Chairman of Goldcorp Inc, made a salary of \$23 million in 2006. Goldcorp CEO Kevin MacArthur made over \$6.5 million in one day through selling off company stocks. The price of gold currently hovers close to \$1,000 an ounce.

In the department of San Marcos and the municipalities directly surrounding the Marlin Mine- Sipakapa and San Miguel Ixtahuacán -- 86.7% of the population live in poverty and over 61% in extreme poverty. An estimated 16 thousand campesinos (small-scale farmers) are without land. Most people dedicate themselves to small-scale agriculture and rely heavily on natural water sources in the semi-arid region. The Marlin Mine is an open-pit mine that requires large amounts of water for cyanide filtering. In a single hour, the mine guzzles no less than 250,000 liters of water -- the same amount an average family in the region consumes in 22 years. In San Miguel Ixtahuacán, residents report that since the mine began operating, wells have dried up and that fruit trees are dying due to dehydration. The remaining water sources are at risk of severe cyanide contamination, with high levels of heavy metals already detected in the rivers. Residents have reported an increase in livestock deaths and in the incidence of miscarriages, as well as hair loss and skin disorders. People's homes have cracked due to explosions from the mine. and what are the promises of development in return? Goldcorp pays only a 1% royalty to

Guatemala, split between the municipal and national governments, meaning the company takes 99% of the profits with them out of the country.

The people of Sipakapa have voiced their opposition to the pillage of their natural resources and the disregard for their autonomy. From the beginning, organized opposition mobilized against the construction -- and was swiftly countered by militarized crackdowns. One youth activist died in January 2005 when 1,500 police and 300 soldiers confronted protesters blocking the entry of a company truck on the road to the mine. In San Miguel Ixtahuacán, lawsuits were brought against seven community leaders for protesting coercive land appropriation strategies of the company in an attempt to silence organized resistance. However, Goldcorp continued to insist that it had full support from local communities in San Marcos.

That claim was exposed as a lie on June 18, 2005 when the people of Sipakapa, San Marcos held the first popular referendum over a mega-project in Guatemala history. Fully 98% of the population voted "NO" to mining in the region. This "*consulta*" was held with the permission of the municipal authorities and abided by the provisions of the International Labor Organization's Convention 169, ratified by Guatemala in 1996, that grants indigenous peoples the right to consultation regarding any development project affecting their lands. However, the Guatemalan Constitutional Court, acting in the interests of the mining company, declared the referendum valid, but unbinding. The legitimate declaration of the communities has been ignored to this day.

### A HISTORY OF DEATH BY MINING

Mining by foreign companies was prohibited in Guatemala during the years of the revolutionary government. It wasn't until 1954, after a CIA-organized coup overthrew democratically elected president Jacobo Arbenz and implemented a military dictatorship that the tide turned for foreign mining companies. Conflicts over land rights between mining companies and communities played a role in fueling the violence and repression during Guatemala's 36-year internal conflict, a war that left over 200,000 people dead or disappeared. Mining companies were consistently complicit in the kidnapping and disappearing of local leaders.

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