



CHOROPAMPA, THE PRICE OF GOLD
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www.guarango.org

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From the documentary *Choropampa, The Price of Gold*/Guarango Cine y Video, 2002

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1. CHOROPAMPA: THE SITUATION TODAY

Health: situation continues to worsen

Villagers are now experiencing the long-term health effects of mercury poisoning, including liver and kidney disease, frequent miscarriages, central nervous system disorders, loss of hearing, blindness, mental deficiencies and paralysis.

We have tried to convince researchers at top American and Canadian universities as well as non-profit medical organizations, such as Doctors Without Borders, to conduct independent studies and provide medical care. So far we have received a lot of interest, especially from groups using the film to press for a UN ban on the use of mercury, but nothing concrete for Choropampa.

Jessica Nimboma, a 17-year-old student who hopes to study medicine to help her community, is losing her sight and the doctors say there is nothing they can do. She graduated top of her class in each year of high school and hopes to pass her university entrance exam this year, despite her failing eye sight and excruciating migraines. (Jessica is the daughter of Virgilio Nimboma who closes the film with his philosophical comments about Peru's tormented history with gold mining). Her story is just one of hundreds of tragic examples.

Yanacocha claims they will provide medical care for anyone who can PROVE they are suffering effects from the mercury spill. This would apply only to the nearly 1,000 men, women and children who have government certificates proving they were poisoned. But villagers say they are unaware of Yanacocha's promise to provide medical care and feel abandoned by the company, which no longer has a presence in Choropampa. (The Yanacocha mine is about a 3 hour drive from Choropampa, so the mine's trucks pass through the village on the way to and from Peru's capital city on the coast – they do not stop in Choropampa.)

The mayor:

Lot received a 3-year sentence and US\$1,000 fine for leading the highway blockade featured in the film. We connected him with a non-profit group that provides legal aid for communities affected by mining. They appealed the sentence but lost. Fortunately, his sentence is being served OUTSIDE jail, like probation. He must report to a judge on a monthly basis and can not leave the country. After much paperwork, we were able to get special permission for Lot to present the Choropampa film at Barcelona's human rights film festival in 2003. Lot was the star attraction and made contacts with many non-profit groups and activists interested in helping the village. His term as mayor ended in January of 2005.

The US legal suit:

The US law firm representing Juana Martinez and over 1,000 mercury spill victims went through an exhaustive series of appeals in the US court system and finally, last year, won the right to have the case heard in the United States. This means Newmont is being sued for the mercury spill in a United States court, rather than a Peruvian court (the lawyers argued successfully that their clients would not receive a fair trial in Peru because the judicial system is corrupt).

Newmont was understandably highly DISTRAUGHT about the case and wanted to settle out of court. But early this year negotiations broke down and both sides announced the case will go to court.

This is the same law firm that worked with Erin Brocovitch, of the Julia Roberts Hollywood movie fame.

2. THE FILM'S IMPACT:

The film was released in November of 2002 and has taken on a life of its own, playing at over 30 international film festivals and winning five awards. It has been broadcast on television in Peru, Canada, Argentina and the United States (including 10 broadcasts on the Sundance Channel and a highly publicized broadcast on a public television station in Newmont's home state of Colorado).

But we wanted to make sure the film would also serve as an education and advocacy tool for mining communities in Peru's isolated and marginalized mining communities. So we have donated more than 600 video copies and DVDs to activists, community leaders, civil society groups, educators and independent media throughout Peru.

We have received reports from Peruvian and international allies of grassroots screenings throughout Peru and also in Ecuador, Chile, Guyana, Argentina, Boliva and Mexico. For example, Rodrigo Ruiz, a Peruvian activist, took his copy to Argentina and screened the film in seven cities, as part of the Mapuche indigenous group's campaign against the sale of Patagonia to foreign companies. Ruiz wrote that the screenings in Esquel, where local leaders were trying to prevent a Canadian company from constructing a mine, had a particularly "explosive" effect. While Ruiz was in town, a mining official held a press conference to insist that 'modern' mining is safe and environmentally sound. Somewhat incredibly, he cited the Yanacocha mine as a fine example of social and environmental responsibility. The following day, Ruiz's group held a counter-press conference and presented the Choropampa film in several public spaces.

"People were affected," writes Ruiz. *"They laughed, got angry, applauded when the Choropampinos stood up to the police, and I saw some of them shed tears at the end of the film."*

3. NEWMONT MINING CORPORATION: GLOBAL WOES CONTINUE

The Colorado-based company that owns the controlling interest in the Yanacocha gold mine. Basically, these are the folks in charge.

Globalized Activists get tough on Newmont:

Newmont is the world's largest gold mining corporation and Guarango belongs to an international coalition of grassroots activists and groups monitoring this company's mines around the world. (Newmont owns the Peruvian mine responsible for the Choropampa spill and Mt. Quilish expansion plans. Please scroll down a few paragraphs to read more about Mt. Quilish).

In recent years, Newmont has been plagued with environmental and social conflicts at mines around the world. In 2004, six Newmont officials were jailed in Indonesia in connection with the company's contamination of a nearby Bay with mine waste. The company officials were released, but the government is pressing criminal charges and activists managed to get the story covered in the New York Times and Wall Street Journal. Just this month the Indonesian government announced it will sue Newmont for \$133 million in damages for the alleged pollution. Locals report a myriad of health effects connected to heavy metal poisoning, but Newmont denies responsibility.

As a result of this "think local act global" campaign, Newmont's own stockholders are taking action to try to reform the company from within. Boston Common Asset Management, a social-investment firm that holds 3,100 shares of Newmont stock, has filed a shareholder resolution demanding a report on the company's human- and environmental-rights record around the world. The move came after Boston Common Asset Management received information about Newmont's global malpractices, including a copy of the Choropampa video.

This April the largest US pension fund, Calpers, announced it will vote against a stock incentive plan at Newmont because of the company's "poor performance". Newmont's poor record in 2004 was linked to social and environmental conflicts at its mines around the world.

All the external and internal pressures have brought about some changes in Newmont's policies and operations. Although numerous abuses and malpractices continue, the company seems to be taking environmental and social issues more seriously. In Cajamarca, Peru, a round table has been formed representing a wide range of civil society groups, local authorities and mining representatives to work for more socially and environmentally responsible mining. The company has hired the same consulting firm that set up the BHP-Billiton round table in Cuzco, heralded by international groups, like Oxfam, as an encouraging step for the mining industry. (This same international firm is using copies of both the Tambogrande and Choropampa videos in its training and work with major multinational mining, oil and gas companies.)

And Newmont has also announced a \$700,000 partnership with the University of Colorado School of Medicine to conduct baseline health studies of residents near two proposed mines in Peru and Ghana. This is a ‘watching our back’ move from Newmont – the studies are meant to provide scientific records of villagers pre-existing health problems BEFORE the mines begin operations. Newmont feels this will protect the company from lawsuits once the mines are up and running and causing their usual contamination. However, if the studies are conducted independently and data is not misrepresented or altered, the plan could work in favor of local communities by proving that contamination from mining DOES negatively effect human health. Unfortunately, none of these steps get to the root of the problem: that Newmont should be working to PREVENT contamination before it happens and provide health care and remediation to locals if and when their health is affected by the company’s activities.

4. NEW PROJECTS:

Saving Mt. Quilish

Newmont has bought out several smaller companies and is now the world’s largest gold mining corporation. The price of gold has hit record highs over the past three years and Newmont has reaped the profits – Wayne Murdy, Newmont’s president (featured in the film), earned US\$4.35 million in 2003.

All this despite rising production costs at Newmont’s key mines. The increased costs are at least partly associated with environmental and social problems. For example, Peru’s Yanacocha gold mine (from the film) is South America’s largest gold mine and the jewel in Newmont’s global empire. However, last September a blockade of the mine led by farming communities shut down operations at Yanacocha for two weeks. The mine’s shares plummeted immediately and led to an overall 12 percent drop in sales last year and 23 percent increase in production costs.



**Filming the highway blockade against Yanacocha in September 2004.
Photo by Carolina Herrero/Grufides**

We filmed the blockade and have been filming and working with activists and farmers on the struggle to save Mt. Quilish since 2000. *Saving Mt. Quilish* will be the third film in our series on Peruvian communities and transnational mining. The *Choropampa* film exposed the negative impacts of unregulated mining. *Tambogrande, Worth More Than Gold*, the second film, celebrates innovative methods of community resistance, including grassroots democracy and artistic protest. It chronicles the campaign of mango farmers from Peru's northern coast to preserve their fragile fruit-growing valley from mining development. *Saving Mt. Quilish* rounds out the series, focusing on conflict resolution through mediation.

Here's a synopsis of the Quilish video, which should be released in late 2006:

A decade of protests against South America's largest gold mine culminate in a dramatic two-week highway blockade by peasant farmers. Supporters from the capital city and across the state join the struggle, marked by mass protests, tense negotiations and police violence. Father Marco Arana, a local parish priest, is called upon to mediate the dispute.

This heroic yet humble priest averts violence at every turn, negotiating the release of hostages, calming stone-throwing students and halting attacks by riot police on demonstrators. We follow Father Marco through these incredible two weeks, providing an intimate insider's view of conflict resolution in action.



**Father Marco negotiating with police during the blockade
Photo courtesy of Grufides**

Tambogrande, Seated on a Bench of Gold



Tambogrande's mayor Francisco Ojeda calms tensions during an anti-mine protest

Here's a synopsis of the Tambogrande film, which will be released later this year:

Brave Peruvian mango farmers take on a Canadian company, corrupt politicians and the global mining industry to save their fragile valley from mining development. These determined farmers choose mangos over gold in an epic tale of ordinary people rising to heroic deeds in times of great crisis.

Mounting tensions erupt into violence and the town's visionary leader, Godofredo Garcia, is assassinated. His memory unites the townsfolk and guides them down the path of nonviolence. Godofredo's disciples channel the community's anger and rage into peaceful resistance, using music, dance, art, democracy and the internet to triumph over their foes. Tambogrande's original methods win supporters around the globe and inspire struggles as far away as Ghana, the United States, Argentina and Indonesia.

Please see www.guarango.org for more information about this project.

5. HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED:

Send politely worded letters requesting health care and fair compensation for the mercury spill victims to Wayne Murdy, the president of Newmont Mining Corporation, with a copy to the vice president of the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank (a minority shareholder in Yanacocha).

Wayne Murdy
President, Newmont Mining Corporation,
1700 Lincoln St. Denver, CO 80203, USA

Peter Woicke
Executive Vice President
International Finance Corporation
2121 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20433 USA
FAX: +1-202-974-4359

AND

Join the 'No Dirty Gold' campaign, run by a coalition of global activists working on mining issues. Download free information, find out about timely campaigns and sign their on-line pledge to end dirty gold mining practices. (The idea being to use consumer pressure to make the gold industry more environmentally and socially responsible). The campaign is coordinated by Oxfam America and Earthworks, two US-based non-profits.

Web Page: www.nodirtygold.org

6. FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Check out www.guarango.org for info on all three of our mining video projects and download free teacher and activist guides in Acrobat Reader on Tambogrande and Choropampa in English or Spanish.

For queries and additional information please contact:
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