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Complaint filed against World Bank Group for Funding Eco Oro Minerals Gold Mine in Fragile Colombian Wetlands

Downstream community submits complaint to the IFC's Ombudsman

Bucaramanga, Colombia – Today, local groups in Bucaramanga, Colombia filed a complaint against the World Bank Group's investment in Eco Oro Mineral's Angostura mining project with the Compliance Advisor Ombudsman (CAO), the independent grievance mechanism of the International Finance Corporation (IFC). The complaint cites, among ten main concerns, the IFC's failure to evaluate the potentially severe and irreversible social and environmental impacts of the project, a large-scale gold mine located in a fragile, high-altitude wetland, called the Santurbán páramo, which provides water to over 2.2 million Colombians.

The Committee for the Defense of Water and the Santurbán Páramo, a coalition of nearly 40 groups living downstream of the project in Bucaramanga, asserts that the IFC, the World Bank's private-sector lending arm, ignored its own policies before investing US\$11.79 million in Greystar Resources – now Eco Oro Minerals – in 2009. The IFC bought shares before the company had completed required environmental and social impact assessments.

“There could be some twenty municipalities affected by this project. We think it is outrageous that such a damaging mining initiative has the backing of the World Bank, whose mission is to advance real and sustainable development,” said attorney Miguel Ramos, member of the Committee, which includes a diverse group of human rights, environmental, student and business organizations.

Following tens of thousands-strong protests and controversial hearings, the Colombian Ministry of the Environment rejected the Vancouver-based company's initial request for an environmental license, citing the country's environmental and constitutional law prohibiting mining activity in páramo wetlands.

Páramos are fragile ecosystems that supply about 75% of Colombia's freshwater, including the drinking water of millions of people, and play a key role in mitigating and adaptation to climate change.

The Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense (AIDA), the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL) and MiningWatch Canada support the Committee's request that the CAO audit the project and recommend a full withdrawal of IFC funds.

“The IFC promotes itself as a leader in environmental and social standards,” said Natalia Jiménez Galindo, a lawyer with AIDA. “Its stamp of approval paves the way for other investors. In this case, the IFC did not even ensure minimal protection for communities and the environment by requiring an environmental and social impact assessment.”

Eco Oro’s project has already stimulated investments from at least five other companies in the immediate area, more than doubling the area under mining concessions in the Santurbán Páramo.

“The IFC invested in Eco Oro’s mine, explicitly stating that were it successful it would spur other investments in Colombia’s mining sector. But the IFC did not do its homework to consider the serious environmental, social and economic consequences, particularly in an area that has been a conflict zone,” said Jen Moore, Latin America Program Coordinator for MiningWatch Canada. “It should reevaluate its investment and pull out.”

The complaint alleges that the IFC glossed over potential security issues related to Eco Oro’s project. It provides documented evidence of violence associated with guerrilla and paramilitary activity following the establishment of military installations in the area in 2003, which contradicts company claims.

Eco Oro holds mining rights to nearly 30,000 hectares (74,130 acres) of land in the Santurbán páramo, near the city of Bucaramanga in the department of Santander. In response to the rejection of its 2009 open-pit mine proposal, the company said in 2011 that it would pursue a completely underground mining operation, but the people of Bucaramanga remain widely opposed to the project. The region is thought to contain important deposits of gold, coal and other minerals.

Full text of the complaint [here](#).

For more information:

[Committee for the Defense of Water and the Santurbán Páramo](#)

[AIDA’s work Protecting Colombia’s Freshwater](#)

[IFC’s Office of the Compliance Advisor/Ombudsman \(CAO\)](#)

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AIDA defends the individual and collective right to a healthy environment through the development, implementation, and enforcement of national and international law. “Freshwater Preservation” is one of our five areas of institutional focus. Clean water is a cornerstone of human and environmental health, and AIDA works to protect ecosystems that serve as vital freshwater resources for nearby communities and biodiversity.

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