

PRESS RELEASE

KEEPING UP ON CAMPAIGN PROMISES AT LAST?

Canadian Government Expected to Announce Creation of Ombudsperson Office

MONTREAL — Next week, Canada is expected to finally make an announcement concerning the creation of an ombudsperson office to supervise human rights abuses associated with Canadian mining in Latin America. A long-time advocate for the office, Liberal MP John McKay says that although the position would not be a perfect solution, “it’s one more step along a path of accountability.”

Canadian companies first forays into Latin America were in the 1960s, continuing through the 1970s as the value of gold surpassed \$600 an ounce. Due to a massive debt crisis across Latin America in the 1980s, Latin American governments decreased their tariff rates on average from 45% in 1975 to 13% in 1995. They also loosened regulations on foreign companies so that they would continue to invest in the region. During this period, more than ninety governments created new mining codes that allowed corporations to access mineral deposits for free and removed investment caps in national mining projects. This led to a broad influx of international investment, which in turn led to a broad influx of conflict surrounding these operations.

Canadian mining companies operating in Latin America have been allowed to act without much regulation, which has led to the perpetration of many environmental harms and human rights abuses, including the criminalization of environmental defenders, displacement of indigenous communities from their ancestral lands, and water contamination leading to severe health risks.

The Canadian government has encouraged the creation of Corporate Social Responsibility programs within these companies, but these are voluntary and have no legal bindings or clear consequences for the mistreatment of communities and the environment. Many non-governmental organizations, advocacy groups, and politicians have urged for the creation of an ombudsperson to investigate complaints against companies and help mediate conflicts between companies and local communities.

Activists are hoping that the creation of the office of the ombudsperson will end the systemic impunity for mining companies in Latin America.