

Costa Ricans protest open pit gold mining, 2010

- [\(mainly or initiated by\) people of color](#) [1]
- [\(mainly or initiated by\) student participants](#) [2]

Timing

Time period notes:

At the time of writing this campaign appears to be complete, although it could resume if Infinito is successful in its appeal of the November court ruling against the mine

April 20,
2010

to:

November
2010

Location and Goals

Country:

Costa Rica

Location City/State/Province:

San José

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

1. The cancellation of the Costa Rican Environment and Energy Ministry's executive decree 2007, in which former president Oscar Arias declared the mining a matter of "national interest."
2. Repeal of the 2008 executive order by the former president Arias that had established an environmental safeguard for mining in Costa Rica.
3. That President Elect, Laura Chinchilla, veto the operation of Las Crucitas mine and declare a moratorium on open pit mining for metals.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 035. Humorous skits and pranks
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 2nd segment:

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 038. Marches

Methods in 5th segment:

- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 6th segment:

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors

Segment Length:

Approximately 7 months 1 week

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Environment

Group characterization:

- Costa Rican citizens
- Environmentalists
- University students

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Not Known

Partners:

Grupo Costa Rica en Acción

Association for the Preservation of the Wild Flora and Fauna

North Front Against Mining

Not One Mine Coordinating Committee

External allies:

Ecological Action Network (Renace)

Involvement of social elites:

Rocio Carranza Maxera, Costa Rican actress

Costa Rican President Laura Chinchilla eventually supported the campaign

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Association for the Preservation of the Wild Flora and Fauna
- Grupo Costa Rica en Acción
- President Chinchilla

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

- Ecological Action Network (Renace)
- North Front Against Mining (V) Not One Mine Coordinating Committee
- Rocio Carranza Maxera-Costa Rican actress

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length:

Approximately 7 months 1 week

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Former President Oscar Arias and Industrias Infinitos, a subsidiary of Infinito Gold Ltd. based in Calgary, Canada

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Not known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Total points:

10 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

The protesters were able to complete all their goals. Although the mining company says it will appeal the court's decision, as of now, the campaign was successful. Furthermore, future open pit mines are banned as a

result of the campaign.

The campaign survived to see the closing of the mine. It is not yet known if it will survive to see the appeal of the court case.

The campaign grew as environmentalists and concerned Costa Ricans learned more about the affect that mining would have on the environment and the eco-tourism industry.

In 2008, former President of Costa Rica, Oscar Arias authorized the removal of over 600 acres of yellow almond trees in order to build a gold mine in Las Crucitas, a small town in Northern Costa Rica. Costa Rican law prohibits the cutting down of these trees, as they are the main source of food for the endangered green macaw. However, Arias went ahead with his authorization, making an agreement with Industrias Infinitos, a subsidiary of Infinito Gold Ltd., a Canadian mining company to mine an estimated \$1 billion worth of gold.

While the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court stopped Infinito's mining work in 2009 after hearing 18 appeals filed by environmental organizations, Infinito regained a concession to begin preparing the mine on April 16, 2010. Several hours later, an administrative appeals court once again halted the project, after the Association for the Preservation of the Wild Flora and Fauna filed an appeal questioning the legality of the project's environmental impact study and the public decree signed by the former president Arias in 2007 which declared the mine to be of public interest.

Immediately, Costa Rican students, environmental activists, and other citizens came together to support the appeal and protest the reopening of the mine. Concerned about the destruction of the macaws' habitat and the use of cyanide that would occur in the mining process and could have potentially leaked into the San Juan River, protesters demanded that the new President-elect of Costa Rica, Laura Chinchilla, cancel the Costa Rican Environment and Energy Ministry's executive decree of 2008 which established an environmental safeguard for mining in Costa Rica, and the public decree of 2007. They also asked that she veto the operation of Las Crucitas mine and declare a moratorium on open pit mining for metals. While Laura Chinchilla did not have an explicit position on environmentalism during her presidential campaign, she was clear upon taking office that she would make ecotourism a top priority and that protection of the environment supported this.

The first action took place on April 21. Protesters gathered in front of the San Pedro Mall and dug a hole, educating people walking by about open pit mining and the destruction of hundreds of acres of forest. Some activists dressed up as tractors and construction workers while others danced around the hole and sang songs. The protesters also used the action to highlight the march set for the following day.

On April 22, close to one hundred Costa Ricans gathered on the steps of the Supreme Court building in downtown San Jose. The protest began at 10am and an hour later the mass had grown to include thousands of individuals. At noon they marched down the street towards Central Park, carrying posters and banners, which read, "The earth is not for sale," and, "Open-pit mining out." Others carried drums and Costa Rican flags, chanting in Spanish, "Yes to life, no to the mine."

The following month, on May 8, President Chinchilla entered office and on the same day she signed a decree banning open-pit mining in Costa Rica. The decree suspended "the exploration, extraction and processing of materials extracted through the use of cyanide and mercury." Additionally, she repealed the 2008 executive order by the former president Arias that had established an environmental safeguard for mining in Costa Rica.

On July 12, protesters marched from San José to Las Crucitas, over 100 miles, to protest the executive order of 2007. Before leaving, the marchers presented Chinchilla with a petition to revoke the executive decree if the court were to respond negatively to the appeal made in April.

On October 8, fourteen activists from the North Front Against Mining and the Not One Mine Coordinating Committee set up an encampment in front of the Presidential Residence in San José where they sat for over two weeks. That same day, these activists began a hunger strike, though only three remained fasting after two weeks. Included among the strikers was Costa Rican actress Rocio Carranza Maxera. While she was not able to fast for the two full weeks, she did bring a great deal of media attention to the action. Like the marchers, the hunger strikers demanded that the President cancel the executive decree of 2007.

On November 9, the Costa Rican congress voted to ban all new open-pit mining projects, though they did not rule to block the development of the Las Crucitas mine.

Nonetheless, on November 25, the appeals court voted to strike down the concession granted to Industrias Infinitos on April 16. Additionally, the court also asked that a prosecutor open a criminal case against Arias and seven other individuals who had been a part of his administration.

According to recent news articles, Infinito plans to appeal the court's decision and the case may not be fully settled until 2011.

Research Notes

Sources:

Bystrom, Andy. "Thousands Protest Against Crucitas Gold Mine." Costa Rican Conservation Network's Blog. 22 Apr. 2010. <<http://costaricanconservationnetwork.wordpress.com/2010/04/22/cyanide-applicationdeforestationthousands-protest-crucitas-mine/>>.

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McDonald, Mike. "Costa Rica's Chinchilla Issues Decrees Her First Day on the Job." The Tico Times. 8 May 2010. Web. <http://www.ticotimes.net/dailyarchive/2010_05/0508104.cfm>.

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Weekly News Update. "Costa Rica: Activists Fast to Protest Gold Mine." World War 4 Report. 26 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.ww4report.com/node/9204>>.

Additional Notes:

Most resistance to the protesters came from the gold mining company and members of the previous presidential administration. While there was mention of police in several of the news articles cited above, they only say that the policemen escorted the protesters, not that there was any violence or acts of repression.

According to recent news articles, Infinito plans to appeal the court's decision and the case may not be fully settled until 2011.

Edited by Max Rennebohm (15/06/2011)

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Kylin Navarro, 01/12/2010

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