

Cerrejón coal mine Colombia

Sectors: Coal Mining

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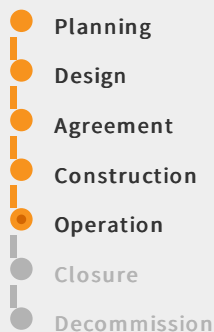
Status



Sectors Coal Mining

Location

Status



Website <http://www.cerrejon.com/site/>

About Cerrejón coal mine

The Cerrejón coal mine in La Guajira, Colombia, is the largest in Latin America and one of the largest in the world. Its steady expansion since its founding in 1976 has led to the destruction of whole villages populated by local indigenous and Afro-Colombian people. The extracted coal is almost exclusively for export to rich countries with local people seeing few benefits. The mine is owned by three giant UK-listed mining companies: BHP Billiton, Anglo American and Glencore. All of which receive billions of pounds in finance from UK banks and pension funds.

Roche, Chancleta, Tamaquitos, Manantial, Tabaco, Palmarito, El Descanso, Caracoli, Zarahita, Patilla. These are the names of just some of the communities that have been devastated or simply wiped off the map by the Cerrejón mining project.

Latest developments

At the Coalface: Ten more years of UK coal burning a lifetime on the ground

Jan 18 2016

Cerrejon Coal wants to reroute a river to get at more Colombian coal

Aug 4 2015

Impacts

Social and human rights impacts

While the Cerrejón mining company's promotional material gives the impression that it is helping the displaced communities, the reality is that the mining company has used underhand tactics to buy off individuals and sow internal division within the communities. So while a few people in the village of Roche were paid extra money to leave early, others who decided to stay, faced power cuts and water shortages that lasted for weeks at a time. Local people have formed an organisation, FECODEMIGUA, to defend their interests and demand compensation.

In 2011, the mining companies behind Cerrejón approved plans to expand the mine further, which would have required the rerouting of 26 kilometres of the Rancheria river, the main river in La Guajira province. This "P500 project" was vehemently opposed by local people as the river is their main water source. In November 2012, the mining companies announced that they were suspending studies into the rerouting of the river. Although welcome, the local communities do not believe that this stay of execution will last for long. The companies are still planning to expand the mine by other means and local villagers still face being forced to leave their homes.

The project spans a vast 69,000 hectares of land in the middle of the territory of the indigenous Wayuu people, who share the area with people of African descent, local farming communities and other indigenous groups.

The Cerrejón mining company has exploited cheap labour and forced mine workers to live and work in conditions that have damaged their health. According to the coal mine workers' union, Sintracarbon, 700 workers at Cerrejón are suffering from serious health problems as a direct result of the inadequate working conditions at the mine. Workers have to work 12 hour shifts and do not receive adequate medical attention. Pro-union workers have been reportedly intimidated or sacked and replaced with casual workers who are paid less than their permanent counterparts. In 2008, one union leader, Adolfo González Montes, was tortured and killed in his own home.

Conditions got so bad that Sintracarbon called a strike in February 2013 which ground Cerrejón to a halt for over a month. While the workers of Cerrejón are struggling to improve their conditions, things are even worse for indigenous groups like the Wayuu who are not getting these jobs at all. They make up just one percent of Cerrejón's workforce, despite the fact that 45 percent of the local population is indigenous.

Women have also seen scant benefit from the mine, as 94 percent of the jobs at Cerrejón go to men.

Environmental and climate impacts

The mine has also caused broader environmental damage to local rivers and habitats. The coal dust from the mine has caused respiratory problems for local people and workers.

Climate change is already having an effect on Colombia. Warming has already led to an 82 percent reduction of glaciers in the Colombian Andes. Colombians have done little to cause this problem. The country's per capita carbon footprint is under a fifth of the UK's and 11 times less than that of the USA.

The Cerrejón mine, however, is making a major contribution to climate change. Every year 32 million tonnes of coal are exported from the mine, mostly to European and North American countries. With the expansion of the coal mine, the companies behind Cerrejón hope to increase this figure to 40 million tonnes. This means that, while local people use very little of the coal, they are having to deal with the effects of climate change, caused by the emission of 82 million tonnes of CO₂ into the atmosphere every year. That is more than the carbon footprint of the entire country of Colombia. If they are successful in burning all the known coal reserves at Cerrejón, the resulting carbon emissions, at over 13 billion tonnes of CO₂, would be equivalent to Colombia's domestic emissions for 184 years.

Governance

Applicable norms and standards

1972 Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping Wastes and other Matters

Alliance for responsible mining

Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative

ILO Safety and Health in Coal Mines

ILO Safety and health in opencast mines

ILO Safety and health in the iron and steel industry

International Council on Mining and Minerals (ICMM)- 10 Principles

OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises

Safety and Health in Mines Convention

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Updates

At the Coalface: Ten more years of UK coal burning a lifetime on the ground

Jan 18 2016

[According to London Mining Network](#): following the UK Government's plans to phase out coal-burning power stations by 2025, Coal Action Network have released [a new report](#) tracing and examining the places, coal burned in the UK, is coming from. And while the Government's announcement hints at a step in the right direction, the prospect of ten more years of demand will still prove deadly for many local communities.

Cerrejon Coal wants to reroute a river to get at more Colombian coal

Aug 4 2015

The manmade rerouting of a precious river: Uniguajira, the University of La Guajira, highlights potential risks of new extraction plans. [By Doris-Elin Salazar.](#)

Cerrejon Coal, Colombia: “an abusive marriage, full of machismo”

Jun 24 2014

[Richard Solly, coordinator of London Mining Network wrote](#): for nearly fourteen years, I have been working in support of communities affected by the Cerrejon coal mine, a vast opencast mine in the province of La Guajira, Colombia. I have just returned from a visit to the area, my first in ten years - and it was a massive, eye-opening shock.

Financiers

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