

Canadians' pension plans invested in mining firms hurting Africa locals

Director hopes film will touch the hearts of Canadian investors and policymakers

Montreal, PQ, October 24, 2007- In the film *When Silence is Golden* Ghanaian villagers confront the policing of their villages, pollution of their water and growing tensions between them and large pension plan funded Canadian mining companies operating in their neighbourhood.

Shot over a period of a year in Ghana and Canada and directed by Alexandra Sicotte-Lévesque, a global youth fellow of the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation, the 52-minute documentary takes viewers on a journey through Ghana where Canadian mining companies are digging for gold.

As the film progresses, viewers learn Ghana is host to more than 100 mining sites owned by Canadian corporations, backed by enormous Canadian pension plans including the Canada Pension Plan (CPP). An estimated \$18 billion of CPP money is invested in mining companies around the globe.

"It is ironic that while Ghana commemorates its 50th anniversary celebrating freedom from outside rule, the people I interviewed in this resource rich West African nation are trapped in a kind of modern day bondage, created by mining companies that go unmonitored by the Canadian government," says Sicotte-Lévesque

Although Canada is one of the strongest advocates within the G8 for the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has put Ghana on its priority list for the past five years, Sicotte- Lévesque says Canada needs to do more to stop human rights violations occurring because of Canadian mining company operations.

"Many initiatives have been taken by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, government agencies like CIDA and by NGOs, however Canada has yet to implement concrete measures to ensure that Canadian mining corporations in developing countries act responsibly," says Sicotte- Lévesque

"I hope this documentary will stimulate discussion and help foster new approaches to pension fund mining company investments in Ghana and across Africa. Policymakers need to be proactive, spend more time in the field and meet for themselves the people they are affecting through their policies," says Sicotte- Lévesque. Hopefully this film will touch their hearts and prompt them to act."

CinéFête, a Quebec based film distribution company, is distributing *When Silence is Golden* to NGOs, local organisations and schools. Amnesty international's Francophone branch and *Journées québécoises de la solidarité internationale* have selected the film for screenings in November, during a campaign focusing on Canadian mining industries and human rights. In addition, Sicotte-Lévesque plans to present *When Silence is Golden* to Canadian government policymakers across the country in an attempt she says, to influence public policy on mining companies operating in Ghana and other parts of Africa.

About Alexandra Sicotte-Lévesque

Alexandra Sicotte-Lévesque is the Co-founder of Journalists for Human Rights. She is an independent filmmaker and radio producer for BBC World Service in London, UK and is a 2006 global youth fellow of the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation.

About the Walter & Duncan Gordon Foundation

The Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation is a registered charitable foundation, supporting the development of sound and innovative public policies founded on values fundamental to Canadians. For more information on the Walter & Duncan Gordon Foundation, please visit: www.gordonfn.org

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