

An open communiqué from SFU and UBC students who identify CIRDI as a threat to the well-being of mining-affected communities

13 September 2014

Dear members of mining affected communities beyond Canada's borders,

As students from Simon Fraser University (SFU) and the University of British Columbia (UBC) which reside on the unceded territories of the Coast Salish people, we write to warn you of a potential threat to your communities. It comes in the form of the Canadian International Resources and Development Institute (CIRDI), previously known as the Canadian International Institute for the Extractive Industries and Development (CIIED) and its network of partners, which we see as working for Canada-based mining, oil, and gas companies, using academics, government institutions, and NGOs to legitimate and normalize their predatory practices.

We are undergraduate and postgraduate students in public health, political science, engineering, law, education, and social work, among other careers, and, in an attempt to ally with your own efforts to protect your families, livelihoods, and futures, for the past year we have been working together to halt this institute.

The majority of the world's mining and mineral exploration companies are headquartered in Canada, partly because Canada has mining, land tenure, tax, and libel laws that flagrantly prioritize the extractive industries' profits above public well-being. Through diplomatic, financial, and now academic means, the Canadian federal government is rapidly encouraging the export of these laws to other countries.

You are probably already aware of Canada's use of diplomatic & economic means to oversee changes to mining, tax, land tenure, and environmental laws in resource-rich countries such as yours, and you are probably already experiencing the impacts. Right now in Guatemala, Honduras, Colombia, Peru, Mongolia and many other countries, there is environmental destruction and social upheaval as a result of Canadian extractive 'investment' there.

CIRDI is a fairly new institute mandated by the Canadian government to "*meet developing countries' needs for policy, legislation, regulatory development and implementation, training, technical assistance, and applied research related to their own extractive sectors,*" though the majority of extraction in these countries is by Canada-based transnational mining companies that take for themselves the majority of the benefits. CIRDI is thus mandated to help lobby your governments to implement legislation that will bring more benefits to Canadian companies, and we recognize that this will come at the cost of your Indigenous and human rights, your control over domestic resources, your decision-making process at the local and national levels, and protections for your environment and your public interest. History attests to Canada's role in undermining other countries' sovereignty and indigenous peoples' autonomy and self-determination for the benefit of companies incorporated here.

CIRDI is housed at three Canadian universities, is partnered with many other universities and NGOs in Canada and elsewhere, and receives many millions of dollars of support from companies in the extractive industry (including Goldcorp Inc.) with allegations of abuse everywhere they operate. Here in Canada, we are manifesting our disapproval of our universities' involvement with this, and that our federal government is funding it. We hope that student efforts here, in the global headquarters of mining, will constructively contribute to your communities' resistance.

We write to you only after performing extensive due diligence that has included

- repeated requests for full disclosure of information about the institute, its budget and projects, and its partners,
- clear explanations on our website (<http://stoptheinstitute.ca/>) of the dangers of how the institute is currently organized and mandated, and our demands for how to reorganize (or close) it,
- multiple invitations to CIRDI executives to bear witness at student-led events challenging the predatory mining industry,
- communication with the organizations, academics, and other groups listed on the CIRDI website as partners/collaborators,
- and we have finally resorted to formal requests for information through BC's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

Our requests for information and invitations to bear witness have received inadequate and limited response; it is now time to warn you.

Because of its mandate, its organizational and financial structure that closely aligns it with transnational extractive interests, and the opacity with which it is run (consistently refusing to answer to the Canadian public), **we identify CIRDI as a threat to the well-being of communities and their environment in the vicinity of mineral or hydrocarbon extraction sites where Canadian companies or their subsidiaries have an interest, and to the local, regional, and national governments' sovereignty to make decisions on their own terms around land and resource use.** The Canadian extraction paradigm holds paramount an unsustainable demand for minerals and hydrocarbons to support an insatiable consumer lifestyle, leading to unproductive arguments for the *inevitability* of Canadian companies' access to the mineral wealth in your country. Under this paradigm, Canadian companies *will* extract your resources, and they know it will be much cheaper if they can manipulate popular opinion for a perceived "social acceptance" of their mega mining projects.

Since CIRDI is mandated by the Canadian federal government, and has many direct links to the transnational mining, mineral exploration, and hydrocarbon extraction industries, people in your country or community will easily see through the thinly veiled language of its vision to "*improve the ability of developing countries to use and benefit from their extractive sector resources in order to stimulate sustainable economic growth and reduce poverty,*" and will be wary to collaborate with the institute. However, CIRDI lacks legitimacy to work in a way that is actually beneficial to the host communities. So, based on the assumption that "*researchers have the trust and credibility in the communities*" that this industry lacks, mining companies, lobby groups on their behalf, the Canadian diplomatic corps, and the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development (DFATD) are partnering with academics and NGOs to act as the front line of their "community engagement" work.

Though the details of CIRDI projects are being withheld, we are aware that the Canadian government has previously funded 'community engagement' projects near mining sites around the world, ultimately aimed at appeasing uncooperative communities so an extractive project can advance. We have not been able to compile a comprehensive list of the names of individual researchers and NGOs yet, but the current list is available at stoptheinstitute.ca/partners-with-cirdi, and will be updated as we find out more.

With this in mind, we advise you to exercise great caution when outsiders approach your community, to ask them enough questions so that your community can be sure that they (academics, NGOs, etc.) are not acting on behalf of the foreign (or Canadian) extractive firms, on behalf of CIRDI (or other groups similar to it), and will not commit your community to agreements that will bring you harm in the future.

In addition to the questions that you already ask outsiders seeking to access your territory or perform any type of 'research' in your community, we encourage you to seek formal (written) confirmation of where their funding comes from, what connections they have to Canadian extractive interests, what university or NGO they're associated with, and what their motivation is. Further, we encourage you to seek input from other communities, groups, or NGOs that you trust to provide feedback on what is proposed in your community. Amnesty International, Rights Action, and Mining Watch Canada are three organizations that we are aware of that could offer third-party analysis, and all operate specifically for peoples' and communities' benefit.

As students in Canada, we are close to the headquarters of international exploitation, but find ourselves distant from the specific experiences of your community as you are faced with extractive projects by foreign transnational corporations. We commit to ally with your cause of sovereignty and dignity as you resist usurpation and destruction of your land and rights by foreign interests. Your feedback and histories will help us to work aligned with your objectives. Please contact us at info@stoptheinstitute.ca.

Sincerely,

Concerned SFU & UBC students

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