

PRESS RELEASE: Colombia Solidarity Campaign

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Landslide Victory for Environmental Defenders in Colombia

Citizens of Cajamarca vote 98% against La Colosa AngloGold Ashanti open cast gold mining project

The *Consulta Popular* (a popular consultation or referendum) held in Cajamarca, Colombia, on 26 March 2017 resulted in a 98% landslide result against mining activities in the municipality (Source: [Registraduria Nacional](#)). Cajamarca is the location of AngloGold Ashanti's flagship La Colosa open cast gold mining project, currently in exploration phase. La Colosa is touted by AngloGold Ashanti to be one of the largest gold mines in the world. However, the result of the referendum paints a bleak future for the controversial project. The referendum was held after numerous obstacles and legal battles, and follows almost a decade of mass mobilisations. In June last year, over 100,000 people in various parts of the Tolima province took to the streets to voice their opposition to AngloGold Ashanti (source: [El Espectador](#)).

AngloGold Ashanti attributes the result of the *Consulta Popular* to "a badly laid-out debate about mining in Colombia". This is despite the fact that AngloGold Ashanti have been promoting the *La Colosa* project over the last decade, with mass media campaigns and large investments in Cajamarca municipality. Following a 900 million dollar investment in Colombia since 2006 (Source: [Reuters](#)), the result shows that AngloGold Ashanti have not managed to secure local support to continue with the La Colosa open cast gold mining project in Cajamarca, Tolima.

What is a Consulta Popular?

According to Article 8, [Law 134 of 1994](#), the *consulta popular* is a mechanism through which, a general question about a matter of local, regional or national importance is posed by the President, governor or mayor (as applicable) to be considered by the electorate. The result of the *consulta popular* is legally binding.

Legal Standing of the Cajamarca Consulta Popular

- According to human rights lawyers from [Dejusticia](#), the municipality council is now obliged to enforce the results of the vote and ban mining within Cajamarca.
- The Ministry of Mining has contested the validity of the referendum, alleging that the Consulta Popular in Cajamarca does not apply retroactively to existing projects. However, the Constitutional Court and Council of State have previously clearly stated that mining concessions and environmental licenses do not constitute acquired rights, and are liable to modifications in the future (points 9 and 10 from [Dejusticia](#) statement). It should be noted that *La Colosa* project is in exploration phase and does not have an environmental license at present. AngloGold Ashanti only have mining concessions within Cajamarca.

Peace and Democracy

Former minister of the Environment, Manuel Rodríguez, while referring to the recently signed peace agreement, said “Peace is constructed from the territories. And one of the ways of building peace is by respecting the decision of people in a region, in this case Cajamarca, about what they consider to be the destiny of their territory.” For Cajamarca “their destiny is to continue being one of the agricultural hubs of Colombia [...] and obviously large scale mining is not compatible with that vocation” (Source: [Caracol Radio](#))

Environmental Defenders at Risk

The Consulta Popular has been held in a context where environmental activists are being assassinated at an alarming rate. After the mass mobilisations last June in Tolima death threats were received by the Environmental Committee of Tolima and other organisations. Since 2016, 120 community leaders have been killed in Colombia (source: [Defensoria del Pueblo](#)). According to [Global Witness](#), Colombia is the third most dangerous country in the world for land and environmental defenders.

Other Consultas Populares in Colombia

Three other municipalities in Colombia have held consultas populares:

- In Cabrera, Cundinamarca, 97% of the population voted against hydroelectric and mining projects in February (source: [El Espectador](#))
- In Piedras, Tolima, where AngloGold Ashanti was planning to locate a Tailings dam for La Colosa project, over 99% of the population voted against activities related to mining in July 2013 (source: [BBC](#))
- In Tauramena, Casanare, 96% of the population voted against petroleum exploration in December 2015 (source: [El Espectador](#))

There is a growing number of municipalities where processes to organise consultas are ongoing: Ibagué, Tolima; Monterey, Casanare; Pueblorrico, Antioquia; Pijao, Quindio.

For background information about La Colosa, please see the Colombia Solidarity Campaign report [La Colosa: A Death Foretold](#).

Contact Information

For more information, please contact mining@colombiasolidarity.org.uk.



The entrance to the polling station. Photo: Viviana Sánchez



People marching to celebrate the result of the vote. Photo: Compañeros Montañeros