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## People are dying because of Canadian mines. It's time for the killing to stop

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 COMMENTS

Most of us don't associate Canadian businesses with assault and murder. But between 2000 and 2015, 44 people died as a result of violence surrounding Canadian-owned mines in Latin America. The stories behind those killings, some of which are documented in a 2016 study by Shin Imai, a professor at York University's Osgoode Hall Law School, are harrowing.

According to his report, mine protesters in Guatemala have reportedly been beaten, arrested, kidnapped and shot. Women living in communities surrounding the mines have been raped. In 2009, a political activist who opposed a Canadian mine in El Salvador was found dead in a well, his fingernails removed.

These atrocities rarely make headlines in Canada. The victims are poor and live in faraway developing countries. The attacks are rooted in conflicts that existed long before the mines arrived on the scene, and the links to Canada can be circuitous.

But despite the distance, these deaths can be the unfortunate side effect of planning decisions made in Vancouver and Toronto. Not that mining executives are looking for this kind of violence—it's bad for business and it puts them in an ethical quandary. But after decades of brutality, complacency can set in. The problems seem intractable and become part of the cost of doing business.

There is cause for hope. As this issue's cover feature documents on page 22, there have recently been some major developments that could result in real change.

One is that countries like Guatemala and Chile are now doing more to protect Indigenous peoples and their land. In 2017, Guatemala's supreme court surprised many by suspending operations at Escobal, a massive silver mine built by Vancouver-based Tahoe Resources, ruling that the government did not adequately consult locals before approving the mine. Tahoe's share price plummeted by 33% in one day, and before long, the company became a takeover target for Vancouver-based Pan American Silver.

Investors were similarly shocked when Chile's environmental regulator ruled that Barrick Gold had to shutter the Chilean portion of its Pascua-Lama mine,

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write down almost half a billion dollars.

More important, for the first time ever, Indigenous peoples are now suing Canadian mining companies through Canadian courts, rather than relying on the local justice system. Cases against Tahoe, Toronto-based Hudbay Minerals and Vancouver-based Nevsun Resources (which was recently acquired) are now being heard in Toronto and Vancouver. If any of those companies lose, the ramifications will be huge. It will essentially mean that Canadian operations in developing countries can be held to the same human rights standard we have here at home, rather than the weaker standard found in many Latin American, South American and African countries.

That will be hard on some mining companies. Having to meet the Canadian standard will put them at a competitive disadvantage to mining companies based in China or Russia, where the injured are unlikely to have such recourse. But there could be benefits as well. As Canada gets a reputation for operating safe, sustainable mines around the world, we may become the preferred source of minerals for more progressive manufacturers and the preferred partner for more progressive investment funds.

The world is changing. Indigenous land claims, environmental standards and protection for human rights will continue to grow stronger in Canada and overseas. Some mining companies will ignore the shift and continue to conduct business as usual. But that approach is starting to get expensive. Just ask Tahoe.

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