

8-23-1991

# Costa Rica: Mineral Deposits Uncovered By Earthquake On Indigenous Reservations Locus Of Conflict

Deborah Tyroler

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen>

---

## Recommended Citation

Tyroler, Deborah. "Costa Rica: Mineral Deposits Uncovered By Earthquake On Indigenous Reservations Locus Of Conflict." (1991). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/5958>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiCen by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [amywinter@unm.edu](mailto:amywinter@unm.edu).

## **Costa Rica: Mineral Deposits Uncovered By Earthquake On Indigenous Reservations Locus Of Conflict**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

*Category/Department: General*

*Published: Friday, August 23, 1991*

At a recent meeting of the Awapas Indian Council in Cachabria, indigenous leaders claimed continued mineral exploration in the region threatened the social and ecological balance of their communities. Community leaders are currently involved in litigation with domestic and foreign mining companies over rich deposits of gold, copper, and coal uncovered by the April 22 earthquake. The mining companies are lobbying the Natural Resources and Energy Ministry to modify legislation toward permitting mining activities in the area. The Indigenous Affairs Law, which created reservations for indigenous communities, prohibits mining and other types of natural resource exploitation on the reservations. Recently, however, an article of the nation's mining regulatory code was repealed. Under the article, the government and indigenous communities had exclusive rights to mineral deposits. Gilbert Gonzalez, general coordinator of Sejekto, the Costa Rican indigenous confederation, said 80 mine operators were already recruiting native workers. Awapas spokesperson Alvin Morales noted that mining operations posed serious environmental and social problems. According to Morales, the high salaries, roads, bridges, schools, and hospitals offered by the companies are accompanied by "environmental damage, exploitation, alcoholism, and prostitution." The mining firms are offering starting wages of up to four times the daily income (equivalent to US\$2.50) earned by local residents in marketing agricultural products. Poor transportation infrastructure accounts in part for farmers' low income. In addition, said Morales, the companies "take advantage of the emergency situation we're facing due to declining prices and the loss of the cacao crop to disease." A representative of the Guatuso Indians said the controversy has brought together groups who have been feuding since pre-Colombian times. He said, "This is a process of extermination, and we are going to fight alongside our brothers of the Talamanca mountains to resist this attack against our culture." Council meeting participants noted that alcoholism and prostitution followed in the wake of opening the state-run oil refinery, Recope. At present, Recope is seeking rights to exploitation of coal deposits uncovered by the earthquake. (Basic data from Inter Press Service, 08/13/91)

-- End --