



Shortlist 2009

Public Eye Positive Award [www.publiceye.ch](http://www.publiceye.ch)

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**Nominated for the Public Eye Positive Award 2009**

**by Arbeitsgruppe Schweiz-Kolumbien (ask), Switzerland:**

## **Jairo Quiroz Delgado**

Position: President of Colombian mine workers' union Sintracarbon (over 3'000 members)  
electro technician and social psychologist at El Cerrejón since 1985

## **and Freddy Lozano**

Position: Local president of a mine workers' union Sintracarbon, Puerto Bolivar  
mechanic (at the mine harbor) since 1986  
Employer: Carbones del Cerrejón Limited (2007)  
Industry: Mining, raw materials  
Owned by: BHP Billiton, Anglo American, Xstrata  
Workforce: 10'430 (2007)

### **In Brief**

*It's a tough fight: Freddy Lozano and Jairo Quiroz Delgado, two union leaders for Sintracarbon, have been working hard for many years to improve conditions at the Colombian coal mine El Cerrejón. With tenacity and a flair for innovation they successfully negotiated a collective labor agreement in 2006. No less unflinching was their support for the threatened farm communities in the area. Now, hoping to force the company into negotiations about terms of resettlement and compensation payments, they are reaching out for international solidarity. Since November 2008 their attention is focused on negotiations with the mining company to renew the collective labor agreement.*

### **Employees Acting Courageously**

As leaders of the mine workers' union Sintracarbon Freddy Lozano and Jairo Delgado are fighting for the rights of the workers at a Colombian open pit coal mine owned by Carbones del Cerrejón Limited. They are also actively engaged in promoting the welfare of the local communities. Due to widespread corruption, the villages in the area have not shared in the wealth generated by the mine. The union leaders are demanding transparency so that the poor may also benefit from tax revenues and royalties collected by the government (\$126 Mio. in 2007) and they have contacted the officials in charge. In their spare time, Freddy Lozano and Jairo Delgado advise people affected by the mine's social or environmental impact about their rights and support them in negotiations with the authorities. They have opened a union office in Barrancas to give the local communities access to their communications equipment. They are networking with partner organizations abroad

and have coordinated international activities such as mailing letters of protest. Sintracarbon not only criticizes the local mine management but also challenges the majority shareholders.

### **Consequences/Successes**

Even the threats of the paramilitary group Aquila's Negras were not enough to intimidate the two union leaders. They shrugged off the risk to their personal safety as part of the price you pay for an international solidarity network. And their mobilizing strategy was a success: the mining company eventually sat down to negotiate and accepted some of the union's demands. The company has agreed to conduct a collective resettlement and pay adequate compensation. Sintracarbon also gained the right to have a say in matters regarding the resettlement and other social projects. The two union leaders effectively brought about a change of awareness in their organization and added important new socio-political issues to the list of Sintracarbon's demands. Also, an independent commission arrived to investigate the social impact of the mine. As a result, El Cerrejón revised their budget and created a 40-person internal "ministry of social affairs". The company now openly admits that the local communities are also affected by the mine.

### **Current Situation and Demands**

The mineworkers are not sufficiently protected from the toxic and carcinogenic substances generated in the mine. Currently some 800 employees are ill. Freddy Lozano and Jairo Delgado demand that the occupational hazards of mining are officially recognized and that afflicted workers are entitled to insurance benefits. In November 2008, Sintracarbon and the mining company began negotiations on a new collective labor agreement. The union hopes to gain unlimited employment contracts for all workers; this would allow them to enjoy the full benefits of the collective agreement and to join the union. Due to low wages thousands of workers are in a precarious situation. As for the promised negotiations with the affected communities over resettlement and compensation issues, the union leaders are urging the company quit stalling. Forced resettlements, expropriations, and other encroachments in anticipation of the mine's expansion plans have taken their toll on the surrounding villages in recent years. Four communities (Roche, Patilla, Chancleta und Tamaquitos) are waiting for a solution that the union is helping to develop. The indigenous inhabitants of Tamaquitos demand new land for a reserve because their village was marginalized by the mine. The company has also promised to (symbolically) reestablish of the village of Tabaco, which was destroyed in 2001.

### **For More Information:**

- [http://www.askonline.ch/monatsberichte/mb08\\_7.pdf](http://www.askonline.ch/monatsberichte/mb08_7.pdf)