



Leo W. Gerard
International President

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Consulate General of Switzerland
1349 W Peachtree Street NW, Suite 1000
Atlanta, GA 30309

Dear Consul,

On behalf of the 1.2 million active and retired members of the United Steelworkers (USW), I write to express our concerns regarding the actions of the Swiss multinational mining company, Glencore.

Glencore claims to foster a “culture of respect”. However, during the global meeting of Glencore unions convened last year on São Paulo by IndustriALL Global Union, workers from Glencore operations all over the world reported that the company is pursuing a culture of confrontation rather than respect. Meanwhile, IndustriALL’s proposals for social dialogue with Glencore have been rebuffed.

Despite increased profitability and production, Glencore is practicing violence, displacing communities, seeking unnecessary cuts from its unionized workforce worldwide, driving down living standards for workers, and destroying communities and cultures. Please see Annex I for detailed information.

Switzerland has a long history of respecting the dignity of workers and supporting collective bargaining. However, Glencore’s behavior abroad tarnishes Switzerland’s good name and reputation.

There is currently a Swiss people’s initiative on responsible business calling for binding rules to ensure Swiss-based companies respect human and environmental rights at home and abroad.

In the light of this public campaign, I urge you as a representative of the Swiss government to engage with Glencore and implore the company to abide by the international standards to which it has committed and to stop the abuse of citizens and the environment in the countries where it operates.

Yours sincerely,

Leo W. Gerard
International President

Annex I

- In the United States, management at Glencore's Sherwin Alumina plant in Texas has locked out members of the United Steelworkers (USW) since 11 October 2014. Glencore was demanding unreasonable concessions during the USW's round of collective bargaining negotiations. These concessions include stripping retirees of health care benefits and therefore denying the next generation a secure retirement. Unfortunately, a second lockout was initiated by Glencore at another site, Century Aluminium in Kentucky, USA, where about 560 USW members were locked out for reasons similar to Sherwin Alumina. The reason for the lockout is that workers are resisting Glencore's demands for drastic concessions from the union. The lockout at Century Aluminium ended on the 11 June 2015 after unionized workers voted to ratify a new five-year labour deal with Century Aluminium.
- In South Africa, 800 workers at the Koornfontein mine in Mpumalanga went on strike on 17 October 2014 to protest against substandard severance payments. Glencore offered one week of service per year in this mine and in other operations it is paying three weeks. Workers at Koornfontein not only had to deal with losing their jobs but also an unfair settlement for the many years they produced coal for Glencore. This dispute has subsequently been resolved. However, a new dispute emerged when Glencore announced the closure of another mine, Optimum Coal Mine in Mpumalanga, South Africa. The closure proposed by the mining giant would affect approximately 1,000 permanent employees and 500 contractors. As a result, the National Union of Mineworkers has demanded that Glencore's mining licence be withdrawn.
- In Peru, there is a permanent state of conflict over health and safety. Two conflicts were reported at the Sao Paulo meeting. Workers at the Antamina mine went on strike on 10 November 2014 in protest over health and safety violations and over a conflict on profit sharing bonuses, which arose from the company's failure to provide information in line with the provisions of the collective bargaining agreement. At Antapaccay, the company has engaged in a flurry of legal action in an attempt to derail legal remedy in the case of workers fired in a blatant case of union-busting.
- Glencore has violently evicted farmers from their homes in Colombia as well as violated national health and safety laws. Glencore has systematically violated human rights, the right of workers to freedom of association and to freely negotiate a collective agreement.
- In Australia, Glencore has refused to re-hire former employees at the Collinsville mine who are union members and has evicted the former workers and their families from company housing, with devastating impact on the local community. Instead, it rehired workers on non-union contracts. The very same non-union contract workers have been laid off.
- In Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, Glencore is accused of alleged tax avoidance practices.

- The United Steelworkers is especially alarmed about safety issues. In Peru and Colombia, injuries to workers are commonplace and the company refuses to work with trade unions to address these issues. In the United States, the Sherwin Alumina plant already had an injury rate that was twice the national average and now this facility is being operated by inexperienced replacement workers. This reckless approach not only jeopardizes production and profits but could have catastrophic consequences for workers and the communities in which Glencore operates.