

May 18, 2021

## **Earthworks**

1612 K ST., NW, Suite 904, Washington, D.C., 20006

Contact: [jmorrill@earthworksaction.org](mailto:jmorrill@earthworksaction.org)

## **Global Justice Clinic**

Washington Square Legal Services, Inc.

245 Sullivan Street, 5th Floor New York, NY 10012

Contact: [sms1118@nyu.edu](mailto:sms1118@nyu.edu)

## **MiningWatch Canada**

508-250 City Centre Ave, Ottawa, ON K1R 6K7, Canada

Contact: [diana@miningwatch.ca](mailto:diana@miningwatch.ca)

Dear Sir / Madam

In response to your letter dated May 4<sup>th</sup> 2021 in which you express concerns about Barrick's Pueblo Viejo joint venture operation in the Dominican Republic, we would like to take the opportunity to present the facts and trust that you will afford us the time to do so. We pride ourselves on being good corporate citizens and conscientious and responsible caretakers of the environment and, as such, take these accusations extremely seriously.

The mining sector has evolved substantially over the last 20 years thanks to the efforts of mining companies, governments, non-government organizations and an increase in mining investment.

Our commitment to our host communities and the protection of the environment are the foundation on which we have been able to build a sustainable, modern mining company not only in the Dominican Republic, but around the world. At Pueblo Viejo, which we operate, we were responsible for the largest in-country environmental clean-up, remediating environmental damage left by previous operations at the mine. Such actions have significantly contributed to the improvement of the environment and especially the water quality. We have also undertaken more than 600 projects for the benefit of the communities surrounding our operations which include investment in health, water and electrification.

In addition, Pueblo Viejo has been a major economic driver in the Dominican Republic. Exports from 2013 to 2020 averaged around 31% of national exports. Direct and indirect taxes paid for the same period amount to more than US\$2.6 billion, averaging 19% of the total income tax paid by corporations in the Dominican Republic. Our national purchases amount to more than US\$2 billion. Pueblo Viejo has also contributed directly to the development of the Sanchez Ramirez province and local municipalities. Despite the significant benefits that the country and other stakeholders have enjoyed following this investment in the country, Barrick and our joint venture partner, Newmont Corporation, have yet to earn back the money they have invested in the mine to date.

The proposed process plant expansion and additional tailings and waste rock storage capacity has the potential to extend the life of the mine to the 2040s and represents a significant step in ensuring the delivery of the full potential of the deposit for the benefit of all stakeholders, including the economy and the people of the Dominican Republic. Any premature forced closure would have a significant negative impact on the country and its communities.

We would also like to take this opportunity to clarify the facts regarding the project and clear up some of the misconceptions in your letter.

**1. Environmental and human rights impacts, allegations of contamination and displacement in other Barrick Gold operations; and the opaque nature of the expansion process:**

Both Barrick and Pueblo Viejo are committed to operate in an environmentally and socially responsible manner with current and future generations in mind. We have the utmost respect for human rights and would refer you to the Human Rights page on our website and in our Sustainability Reports. We apply international best practice when it comes to protecting people and the environment and we are committed to executing all projects to international standards.

Please bear in mind that our principal criteria for the development of a project is to avoid environmental and social impact as far as possible and then to mitigate, minimize and offset those impacts where they cannot be avoided. Our tailings storage facilities are designed, operated and closed with these criteria in mind and with a particular focus on the operational controls that protect local water sources.

As a result, prior to the construction of the required facilities, we will conduct comprehensive studies including environmental and social studies on and around the proposed footprint. These studies will help us to identify and implement the mechanisms to mitigate potential environmental and social impacts while also designing the initiatives that will improve the livelihood of the communities. To date, we have completed a number of desktop studies for the tailings storage facility and will be completing further field investigations.

The allegations of contamination are unfounded and untrue. As mentioned above, prior to our arrival, the water flowing from the Pueblo Viejo mine to the Margajita River was highly acidic and was unable to sustain aquatic life. We recommend that you verify these inherited conditions in the following public documents:

- 1) Preliminary Evaluation report prepared by the Government preceding our mining rights for Pueblo Viejo (2001).
- 2) The reports conducted under the SYSMIN I and II Programs including: i) Contamination study of the underground waters of the Hatillo limestone as of November 2008; ii) Design for the recuperation of the Mejita basin, Pueblo Viejo Mine as of the year 2008; and iii) Study of the hydrographic basin of the Margajita and Maguaca rivers and the Hatillo tailing impoundment as of November 2008.

The table below shows how the water quality has improved since Barrick took over operation of the mine:

Parameter	Dominican discharge standard for mining effluents	Before Barrick (2004 - 2011)	After Barrick Water Treatment Plant (2013 - 2020)
pH	6 to 9	2.05 to 2.74	7.50 to 8.7
Copper (Cu)	0.5 mg/L	10.2 to 22.7	0.01 to 0.2
Arsenic (As)	0.1 mg/L	2.4 to 15.3	0.005 to 0.03
Iron (Fe)	3.5 mg/L	1,230 to 3,420	0.29 to 0.61
Zinc (Zn)	2.0 mg/L	125 to 373	0.12 to 0.39

Please note that the environmental health, agriculture, and cattle contamination allegations have been extensively reviewed by us and the government authorities and it has been found that these were not attributable to Pueblo Viejo. On the contrary, due to the extensive environmental remediation activities we have undertaken, the water quality now meets regulatory standards. Below is a before and after example of images that attest to the above.



**Figure 1 Margajita River in 2012 (left) and Now (right)**

The water that comes from the operational area is treated at a water treatment plant, in compliance with Dominican discharge standard for mining effluents, before being discharged. An extensive network of more than 100 monitoring wells and 90 surface water quality stations ensures compliance with these standards. Results are reported every six months to the Ministry of Environment. In addition, since 2012, Pueblo Viejo has invited communities to participate in quarterly environmental monitoring which includes water sampling and analysis by a certified laboratory.

Our operations are extensively monitored and personnel from the Environmental and Climate Change Department of the Minister of Energy and Mines as well as the Customs authority, among others, are permanently located on site.

Claims that Pueblo Viejo is contaminating the water are unfounded as they are being made by people living upstream of the operations, or in the Maguaca river basin where we do not discharge water. The majority of these families moved into the area with the intention of being relocated and to resultantly benefit financially from the process. An aqueduct originally constructed for a maximum of 100 families is now servicing more than 600 families that have moved to the area.

We would like to invite you to visit the mine and the surrounding areas to verify the above and would be happy to share any information on our water management and human rights programs to clarify any doubts and disinformation or misinformation that you or your team may have.

**2. Concerns regarding toxicity of the tailings and inability to determine the status of the environmental impact assessment for the tailings dam project from publicly available information:**

Barrick has significant experience managing Tailings Storage Facilities which are carefully monitored and maintained to ensure the stability of the dam walls and prevent seepage of contaminants into the local environment. The tailings will be neutralized and go through a cyanide destruction process prior to deposition. The facility will be designed so that water from the tailings will meet Dominican discharge standard for mining effluents.

Regarding the status of the environmental impact assessment, please note that we have not yet completed the feasibility study nor started the process. However, we have conducted a desktop study of the area and alternative sites and have planned to complete a number of field investigations and sampling programs. In April, we called for public participation meetings to inform the communities about the type, nature and location of studies that Pueblo Viejo would like to conduct.

Information on the status of the project [can be found on our website](#). Once the studies for the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment are complete, they will be made available to the public for review and comment.

Regarding community approval for the studies, an agreement was signed by the provincial Catholic Vicar, the community and Pueblo Viejo whereby the community allowed us to execute the studies. Since then, a minority group of detractors has been spreading misinformation to the communities and preventing us from conveying the facts and undertaking the studies required.

**3. The location of the dam is home to the most vital watersheds, climate change threatens access to water and natural disasters:**

We take all concerns regarding water very seriously and are committed to ensuring that our tailings storage facility will follow global best practices, and we will carefully design and monitor it to prevent any contamination of the environment, including water sources.

Our policies on tailings storage facility management reflects our commitment to operating in a responsible and sustainable manner. Our approach is set out in our Tailings and Heap Leach Management Standard and aligns with international best practice including the recently updated ICMM and Mining Association of Canada's (MAC) Global Industry Standard on Tailings Management. In addition, our Standard stipulates that specifications will meet all national requirements and sets out how we manage our tailings storage facilities from location and design through to operation and closure. We will conduct rigorous and comprehensive studies and the design will incorporate the requirements dictated by such studies. Our dams are designed to be stable, taking into consideration the seismic conditions of the area and the capacity for sufficient storage under extreme rainfall events, without discharge to the environment. The management and operation of the new proposed facility will be in line with the operation of the existing facility at Pueblo Viejo. The new facility will be frequently inspected by our independent review board, composed of world class technical experts.

**4. The expansion process has been opaque and non-participatory:**

Transparency and openness are critical aspects of all our operations. Contrary to your perception, the expansion project has been a participatory process within the local communities. Our Community and Social Responsibility (CSR) team has been engaging with the communities since October 2019; disclosing our intentions to undertake environmental, social and technical studies to determine the feasibility of constructing a tailing's storage facility and subsequently undertaking the permitting process. The Catholic Church was involved in this participation process from the very beginning which resulted in the signed approval document. Last year, the provincial leaders of the Church ceased their conversations with us but we have continued trying to engage with them. The correspondence we had with leaders from the Church is available on request.

As a part of our community relations efforts and in response to a request from more than 150 community representatives, Pueblo Viejo scheduled two public meetings for April 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of this year to launch a public participation process with the objective to both continue sharing information with our stakeholders and to collect comments and concerns, prior to undertaking the tailings storage facility studies. Our first meeting on April 27<sup>th</sup> was successfully executed with around 137 participants and included a representative from Mining Watch Canada.

Unfortunately, our rights to conduct the second meeting on the 29<sup>th</sup> were violated when a minority group, the majority of whom did not represent the community, used violence to intimidate our personnel and the community members interested in participating in the event. Trees were cut to prevent free movement and 15 buses with community members executing their democratic rights to assemble and receive

information, were detained by these people. This group - which is a minority - has been actively working to prevent us from sharing information with the wider communities by threatening our people with violence and also those community members who support us and are interested in obtaining more information about the project.

We call on Earthworks and all organizations interested in the community's wellbeing and environmental conservation and protection, to work with us in disclosing the project information.

To review, in detail, our sustainability strategy and vision and how we have put this into action, please read our 2020 Sustainability Report, "The Gold Standard in Sustainability", published on our website.

We trust that the above information has made clear that our intention is to continue the social and economic development of the Dominican Republic in a responsible manner for the benefit of all stakeholders.

Finally, we are available to meet with you and the other organizations that have supported your letter to provide more details on the above and on our operations, as well as any additional information or clarification that you may deem relevant.



**Mark Bristow**  
President and CEO  
Barrick Gold Corporation