

Updates on the Campaign for Human and Environmental Health in La Oroya

At the Local Level (La Oroya, Huancayo and surrounding areas):

The focus of our efforts at the local level continues to be the full implementation of Regional Ordinance 141 that requires the Regional Government of Junin (where La Oroya is located) to design and implement a Specialized Human and Environmental Health Care program for all peoples impacted by heavy metals contamination. This ordinance, which was originally drafted by our Joining Hands partners and subsequently adopted by the Regional Government in 2012 not only seeks to respond to the medical needs of the people but also to environmental clean-up and prevention of heavy metal contamination in the future through adequate and enforceable environmental protections. Our partners have been highly instrumental in organizing local authorities, health professionals, environmental professionals, community leaders and affected populations to both design such a program and to secure its implementation. In recent months, we have held local workshops with communities across the region to educate them about the ordinance and its implications. Also, in June we held a three day conference in Huancayo (the capital of the region of Junin) in which health professionals, academicians, community leaders and local authorities presented on relevant issues towards the end of creating awareness and establishing an agenda for the design of the Health Care program.

At the National Level (Lima):

In the first quarter of 2017, we facilitated a new health study in La Oroya (as the last one of significance was done more than 10 years ago) as well as two other areas of Peru (Cerro de Pasco and San Mateo) that are also impacted by heavy metals contamination. This study - *made possible in part by a generous gift from Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church at the end of last year* - was finally presented to the public in September at a press conference organized by our partners. The purpose of the study was to show that the primary contaminants (lead, mercury, cadmium, and arsenic) are still very present in La Oroya and other areas of the country where there are mining operations and that there is no effective response from the State in addressing the grave medical concerns.

With such evidence in hand, our Joining Hands partners helped organized a public hearing at the Congress of Peru in collaboration with sympathetic congressmen in order to place Environmental Health in response to heavy metal contamination as a priority. In effect, the objective is to replicate the Regional Ordinance 141 in Junin on the national level.

Also, in relation to heavy metals contamination, a bill of law supported by our Joining Hands partners that would zone areas for mining in order to protect headwaters and watersheds was passed by the Peruvian Congress this past month; however, it is receiving tremendous pushback from the mining industry. In anticipation of such pushback, our Joining Hands partners participated in the making of a documentary called, "***Stories of Water***" which will debut in Lima later this month. [Click HERE to see the trailer](#) (unfortunately it is only in Spanish at this time, but the images themselves tell quite a story; however, for Spanish speakers, you can see Conrado Olivera - Director of Joining Hands Peru - at the 1:21 mark)

At the International Level (Peru and U.S.):

Despite the Congress of Peru [radically weakening air quality standards](#) in Peru in order to facilitate the sale of the metallurgical smelter in La Oroya to an international investor, [there has yet to be a bid placed](#). In response, Congress issued a one year extension on the sale of the smelter in order to auction it off by July of 2018.

In the meantime, the former owner of the metallurgical smelter, New York based Renco Group, Inc., threatened to re-file its international arbitration against the State of Peru, claiming that the State's actions of enforcing environmental standards led to the bankruptcy of the smelter in 2009 and now the subsequent weakening of air quality standards for another potential international investor demonstrates unfair treatment with regard to investor rights stipulated in a trade agreement between Peru and the United States. [Jed writes more about this potential arbitration](#) in his article "Renco Versus Peru, Round II" found on the Presbyterian Hunger Program's blog Together for Justice.

On a more positive note, with our Joining Hands partners, we hosted the IV International Joining Hands Consultation, sponsored by the Presbyterian Hunger Program. In August, the coordinators of six of the eight Joining Hands Networks (Peru, Bolivia, El Salvador, Haiti, Cameroon, Congo, India, and Sri Lanka), gathered in Lima and later in Huancayo with Presbyterian Hunger Program staff and mission co-workers who work with Joining Hands networks. The purpose of the consultation was to share experiences and strategize together in addressing global issues that impact us all, particularly in relation to the extractive industry, trade reform, and food sovereignty. Beyond the information shared and analyzed, the solidarity formed was palpable and re-energizing for this costly work we share.

Photos and descriptions follow below.



Photos above taken by Jed Koball. Starting in the upper left corner and going clockwise: 1) The metallurgical smelter in La Oroya largely sits idle as the State and creditors try to find an international investor to purchase it; in the meantime, heavy metal contaminates in the soil, dust and water continue to poison the people; 2) Joining Hands Peru organized a conference in Huancayo for local authorities, environmental and health professionals, community leaders and affected populations to discuss the implementation of a Specialized Health Program; 3) Joining Hands coordinators from across the globe gathered in Lima for the IV International Joining Hands Consultation; 4) Conrado Oliver, Director of Joining Hands Peru (on the left) presents before a public hearing in the Congress of Peru to make Environmental Health a priority.