

Llan Carlos Dávila leads anti-mining efforts in Guatemala diocese

by [Celeste Kennel-Shank](#) in the [November 25, 2015](#) issue

Llan Carlos Dávila, a leader in church-based efforts against chemical mining in southeastern Guatemala, came to the United States for a speaking tour in October.

He wanted to tell people here about the source of products that are exported from Guatemala.

“We all need to be aware of what we’re consuming,” he said. “We want to join hands to form a more just society, a more humane society, that is more concerned with people than material things.”

Speaking at DePaul University in Chicago, he showed photographs and told stories from his community.

Ellen Moore of the [Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala](#), which organized the tour, explained how the Central American Free Trade Agreement made room for multinational corporations such as Tahoe Resources, a joint U.S. and Canadian company that operates a silver mine in Santa Rosa de Lima.

Dávila represents the Diocesan Committee in Defense of Nature, through which the Catholic Church has been organizing community consultations. These allow local people to express their views on mining operations near their homes and farmland.

He noted that the area’s water sources are located in the mountains near the mine; as a result of water flowing through the mine, livestock are being poisoned, and farmers may not be able to sell their dairy products. And in the year and a half that the mine has operated, 24 wells serving homes have gone dry.

“We’re worried about our children and our grandchildren,” he said. “God created natural resources for us to manage them well, not use them up.”

In a 2011 referendum in Santa Rosa de Lima, 98.3 percent of people opposed the chemical mining of metals. Although they have been protesting nonviolently, the government has sent in the military. Police have arrested dozens and released them without charge.

“These are simple and humble people who are concerned about Mother Earth because it’s how we survive,” Dávila said.

Part of the diocesan committee’s organizing work has been to connect with local mayors as a way to oppose mines, for example, by denying new construction licenses, though many municipal authorities are corrupt, he said. Dávila ran for office himself and in September was elected mayor of his municipality. Since the diocese is not involved in political parties, he ran through a civic committee, which had little money. People elected him despite being offered kickbacks such as agricultural equipment from other politicians.

“We got involved because we think we really can respond to what the people want,” he said.