

# MINING COMPANIES ACCUSED OF 'AGGRESSIVE' TACTICS

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Staff, [The Toronto Star](#) , 25 November 2009

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decision last year to veto glacier-protection legislation that might have affected Barrick's Pascua Lama project in the Andes.

Picolotti told MPs examining proposed mining legislation that foreign mining companies stood out from other business sectors in their resistance to Argentina's bid to tighten up environmental controls.

"They were more standoffish, more resistant, more aggressive and more dangerous," Picolotti said. "I and my closest staff were personally and physically threatened following our mining intervention. My children were threatened. My offices were wiretapped. My staff was bought and the public officials that once controlled Barrick for me became paid employees of Barrick Gold," she told MPs.

"Ultimately, I was forced to resign due to insurmountable pressures from companies like Barrick Gold, who ultimately get their way when our institutions fail to control their performance and compliance."



A man walks by the El Toro II glacier in Chile, a few kilometres from the site for the Pascua Lama gold mine. The mine, which is to straddle the Chile-Argentina border, is being developed by Toronto-based Barrick Gold Corp. PAV JORDAN/REUTERS FILE PHOTO

Vincent Borg, spokesman for Barrick Gold, called Picolotti's allegations "mind-boggling" and "inconceivable."

"It's a sad day when activists parade before a committee of our Parliament making such false and damaging allegations," he said.

"If there was any truth to that, I would assume that she would have reported such nonsense to be investigated by police authorities in Argentina. To my knowledge that has not been the case. It should have been investigated. It was her responsibility to bring that to the attention of the authorities if in fact anything of that sort had occurred."

Picolotti, environment minister from 2006-08, was testifying at hearings into legislation meant to respond to years of allegations that Canadian mining giants were involved in human rights violations and environmental degradation in their overseas operations.

Liberal MP John McKay's legislation (Bill C-300) would give the federal government the power to investigate complaints that Canadian mining operations overseas were not in compliance with international human rights and environmental standards. A company found not to be living up to those standards would be denied access to Canadian taxpayer support.

In his testimony before the committee, Denis Tougas of L'Entraide missionnaire, a Montreal-based Catholic watchdog group, told MPs that Canadian taxpayer money has been invested (through

government-controlled investments like the Canada Pension Plan) into Canadian mining companies alleged to have been committing human rights abuses in Africa.

Tougas, who has researched Canadian mining operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, elaborated on allegations reported in the Sunday Star about the cooperation of a joint Canadian-Australian mining company in a military massacre in the Congo that left at least 73 people dead in 2004.

"Witnesses confirmed that the company did not just transport soldiers but also prisoners, the injured and the bodies of murdered civilians to be buried in at least one mass grave," he said.

As of 2008, CPP had \$20 million invested in the firm, Anvil Mining.

Tougas, testifying in French, told MPs that three Anvil employees (including one Canadian) were acquitted of accusations of complicity in crimes against humanity by a Congolese military tribunal in 2007, but that Louise Arbour, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, has expressed concerns about the tribunal's findings.

Anvil Mining could not be reached for comment. But on its website the company says it is "disappointing that accusations and continuous and repetitive allegations" about its involvement in the attack continue to be raised.

