



# MASCSP

## Madison Arcatao Sister City Project U.S.-El Salvador Sister Cities



U.S.—El Salvador Sister Cities

Winter 2012

OUR PARTNER:  
CRIPDES

### Sister Cities Confront Metallic Mining Together

*MASCSP sponsors speaking tour: Connecting Common Struggles: Destructive Mining in Wisconsin and El Salvador*

Recently, MASCSP, the Sierra Club, OXFAM, the Midwest Coalition Against Lethal Mining (MCALM), the Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice, the Sierra Club, and the newly formed Madison Action For Mining Alternatives sponsored *Connecting Common Struggles*, a midwest tour of anti-metallic mining activists from the US and EL Salvador that included Jan Morrill with International Allies against Metallic Mining in El Salvador, Brother Domingo Solis and Marvin Garcia from El Salvador and Professor Al Gedicks. The group spoke in Des Moines, Chicago, Milwaukee, Eau Claire and at several venues in Madison.

Following are interviews with two of the speakers: Al Gedicks, professor at UW LaCrosse and activist during the Crandon Mine struggle and Marvin Garcia, agronomy engineer from San Sebastian, El Salvador, a community suffering devastating pollution from the near-by gold mine. First, let's hear from Professor Gedicks:

*Governor Walker has pledged to support a bill changing mining laws in Wisconsin to allow fast permitting for an iron ore mine in the Penokee Hills of northern Wisconsin. Why are you speaking out against this action?*

**AG:** This bill, written by the Gogebic Mining Co, allows dumping acidic mine waste into neighboring wetlands. The sulfuric acid waste from the mine would flow directly into traditional wild rice beds of the Bad River Chippewa which are also the spawning grounds for Lake Superior sturgeon. There are no examples world-wide of sulfidation that does not pollute the water downstream so this mine would also threaten the drinking water for the City of Ashland. In addition, fast tracking of the permitting process excludes public discussion of this dramatic change in Wisconsin law and ignores the treaty rights of the Bad River Chippewa.

*What will actually happen if this bill passes and Gogebic gets its permit?*

**AG:** At first, nothing. The market for iron ore is currently depressed so Gogebic will sell to the highest bidder so it can be used when prices increase. Gogebic is actually a coal mining company with no expertise in iron ore mining. Their interest is purely speculative. The eventual

buyer will need to install the latest robotic mining equipment in order to be competitive so robots will be doing the drilling and transport. The promise of jobs and economic boom in northern Wisconsin is a false one. Sadly, the change in laws governing mining will open the door for other mining operations throughout Wisconsin and create similar community division and environmental degradation.

*What are the similarities between struggles over mining in Wisconsin and El Salvador?*

**AG:** In both places, we find embattled communities, sitting on resources and wanting to protect their environment and quality of life. Their voices are first ignored and then further stifled by a combination of mining and right wing government interests. In both El Salvador and Wisconsin, social movements have arisen that include a coalition of people—in our case of Indians, environmentalists, sport fishers and community activists—wanting to defend a resource important to them all-water. In both places, we see community divisions and even violence.

*From your perspective, how does civil society organize successfully to protect our rights to public debate and protection of the environment?*

**AG:** Most important is grassroots education. In El Salvador, the people looked to their neighbors in Guatemala and Honduras to learn about the effects of metallic mining on people's health and the environment; they shared experiences and information widely and finally mobilized a huge number of the population. That's the stage we are at now in Wisconsin. Another strategy we have in common is to use lots of different ways to get our message out--demonstrations, letter writing, social media and many others. During the Crandon Mine struggle, so many local communities passed resolutions opposing the mine that it took 20 minutes for a state legislator to read the list of communities in the Assembly. Even a right leaning government cannot ignore a populace that is so persistent and so loud. Here are some websites that will give your readers more information about the proposed taconite mine and ways to get involved:

[www.savethewatersedge.com](http://www.savethewatersedge.com)

[www.wrpc.net](http://www.wrpc.net)

[www.wnpj.org](http://www.wnpj.org)



*Connecting Common Struggles* public presentation at Edgewood College on November 11, 2013. From left to right: Professor Al Gedicks, Jan Morrill, Marvin Garcia, Brother Domingo

## Salvadoran Agronomist Speaks Out

We also interviewed Marvin Garcia who was a member of the *Connecting Common Struggles* tour. We appreciate Jan Morrill's interpretation of his comments in Spanish.

*Tell us about yourself:*

**MG:** I am married and have three daughters. They are 18, 13 and 2 1/2. I studied agronomy at the University of Central America in San Salvador. In the region of San Sebastian I work on sustainable agriculture programs, a housing program that uses local materials (but not the soil contaminated by mining) and on the issue of mining.

*How does the water contamination in San Sebastian affect people's everyday life?*

**MG:** The water in the river was our only source of water and the waste from the gold mine has made the river toxic. There are very few areas where families can even dig wells that aren't polluted with heavy metals left from the mining process. Now a water truck comes to town and families must buy water for their everyday use. The food sources in the community also are contaminated. The agricultural production is carried out on contaminated soil, which leads to smaller crops and different types of illnesses such as anemia, kidney disease, cancer and depression.

*Why do you support a complete moratorium on metallic mining in El Salvador?*

**MG:** The best solution is to stop mining in the country. It is the only way to protect the health of our population. There are no isolated areas in El Salvador, and there will always be people who come into contact with the pollution from mining.

*What is your advice to communities in Wisconsin in the struggle against metallic mining?*

**MG:** It is easier to struggle when you have concrete information. Gathering information about lakes and rivers that are or could be polluted and sharing it widely is critical. It is important to organize your activities. Many people we met in the midwest are working on building a base of educated citizens, and it is important to keep that work up. I really liked seeing young people participating in the work. The more youth in the movement, the more permanent it becomes over time. The combination of energy of young people and the experience of adults is a perfect formula.

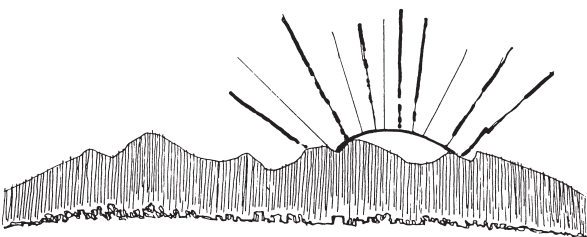
*What lessons should we learn from the struggle in El Salvador?*

**MG:** There needs to be clear mining regulations and laws. Mining companies bring ecological destruction once mining is established. Our struggle has been possible thanks to the different groups and sector of society that have participated. We are stronger because we are diverse. The fact that the hierarchy of the Catholic Church gave an opinion on mining that clearly stated its opposition, has helped us. This diversity creates strong pressure on the government and could help in any part of the world.

The only reason the government of El Salvador stopped allowing mining was because of pressure from civil society. A couple years ago there was a "green mining" campaign promoted by mining companies, but because there was a movement that opposed mining it was not successful. Companies always try to misinform and disguise their projects to get what they want. The social movement has to be ready to respond.

### MASCP continues to support scholarship students in Arcatao

Antonia Avelar, high school scholarship student from Arcatao, addresses a regional CCR meeting of all the scholarship students in the Department of Chalatenango where Arcatao is located. MASCP supports the scholarship program with \$3000 yearly. Sister Cities in the US El Salvador Sister City network, which includes MASCP, supported 30 of the 56 scholarship students from the region in 2012.



## MADISON ARCATAO SISTER CITY PROJECT

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*MASCP is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.*

### Mark Your Calendars

**Dec 16**  
2 PM

**Iyad Burnat: Palestinian farmer and non-violent organizer**  
Memorial United Church of Christ,  
5705 Lacy Road, Fitchburg

**January 27 International Fest**  
12 noon-6 PM Overture Center

Come enjoy performances from all over the world and visit the MASCP booth to see photos and crafts from Arcatao.

**February 10 MASCP/ICWJ Fundraiser & Dance**  
5-9 PM with Beat Road Blues Band  
Harmony Bar, 2201 Atwood Ave

Beat Road Blues... a blend of local blues, rock and soul. Great music delivered to you from six friends, with a guarantee of a great night of fun, music and dancing.