

Coahuila miners still trapped as Mexico's government focuses on covering its tracks

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Since August 3, ten miners have remained trapped in the flooded Pinabete coal pit in Coahuila, Mexico, next to the border with Texas.

The response by the Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) administration has centered around preventing a political crisis since the incident undermines the president's "pro-worker" demagoguery and graphically exposes the disastrous consequences of his government's subordination to corporate interests.

The nervousness of the government has led to a cruel and almost daily game of raising and dashing the hopes of the families of the miners and the millions of people frequently checking the news.

This can only deepen the trauma being experienced by those waiting for their loved ones. María Guadalupe Cabriales, sister of trapped miner Mario Alberto, told *Yancuic* on Wednesday, "Fourteen days have passed, and we see nothing. When they could have entered, they didn't, and now it's flooded again, and everything is crumbling down. We want to have them back no matter how... dead or alive."

Mónica Amaya, the wife of trapped miner José Luis, said to CNN that she still can't sleep and can't find the words to explain to their three-year-old son what is happening: "The first days were really painful for me. I did not even want to go home. I would walk in, and he would wait and look for his father to arrive after me."

On Wednesday, August 10, AMLO's head of public safety, Laura Velázquez said that they were "hours away from rescuing them," but Army divers returned because of debris, despite having underwater drones to check for blockages. The following day, Velázquez said that rescuers would enter the pit, but this failed to materialize. On Friday, she said "We have extracted 97 percent of the water, so we are in conditions to go down today," but the entire crew was cleared due to a

thunderstorm.

On Saturday, the relatives of the trapped miners organized their first press conference, where they pleaded for help from experts internationally and denounced the lack of information from the authorities. As late as Thursday, *Milenio* reported that relatives have said that the authorities don't answer their questions and that what they know comes from media reports.

On Monday, August 15, a devastating new collapse underground brought water levels back to where they were initially.

After two weeks relying on adding more pumps and clearing debris, Velázquez then announced a new plan to drill holes in the neighboring Conchas Norte mine, which was abandoned and has been accumulating water for three decades. They believe this water is now flooding the Pinabete mine and caused the disaster. Then, they plan to use cement to seal it off in a process whose duration no one has talked about. Currently, measurements are being taken and analyzed to find where to drill.

On Wednesday, Velázquez said that two companies, Phoenix First Response from the United States and DMT from Germany, had endorsed their rescue operation so far. However, a planned visit by experts from the American company did not happen, and all consultations were done online. Effectively, this was an expedited attempt to cover the government's tracks and dismiss the families' demands to actually get international support for the rescue operation.

As it seeks to cover up the government's negligence regarding miners' safety, the General Prosecutor's Office announced that it will charge a man named Cristian Solís, the alleged owner of the Pinabete mine in Sabinas, with "illegal exploitation of the subsoil."

However, the Familia Pasta de Conchos (Pasta de Conchos Family), the organization formed by relatives of the 65 miners who died at the Pasta de Conchos mine in 2006, found that Solis is just a local young man—“whose wife makes raffles on Facebook, and whose mother works at a maquila factory”—and who sold his name to protect the real owners.

An investigation by *Animal Político* found that the mine owners had a \$3.7 million contract with the state-owned electric company CFE, which had deemed the mine “safe” for operation between 2020 and 2024.

Several relatives have indicated that the miners had expressed safety concerns, but economic hardship led them to take the risk. In other words, it was common knowledge that this mine was particularly unsafe. More broadly, several miners interviewed from across Coahuila have expressed the same thought: “You go in not knowing if you’ll ever come out.”

The Pasta de Conchos Family declared that the most recent disaster shows that “there are still no protocols for attending to mining emergencies.” It documented 310 deadly incidents at coal mines since 1883, resulting in 3,103 deaths.

The group’s main demands are the recovery of the bodies of their loved ones and a policy of “no repetition” of such disasters. On Friday, three and a half years after coming to power and spawned only by the botched operation in Sabinas, AMLO approved a budget for a haphazard effort to rescue the bodies in Pasta de Conchos.

Just one year ago, seven miners were trapped at an almost identical disaster in a flooded coal pit less than 30 miles away in Rancherías, where the rescue was delayed a full day.

In 2011, the National Commission on Human Rights concluded that none of the mining pits in the region were safe, but millions of dollars continue to be handed out by the CFE to these mines, and AMLO’s energy reform increases the country’s reliance on coal for electricity.

On August 5, AMLO spent five minutes with the families and miners at Sabinas only to tell them to place their faith in the technicians, exuding indifference to the safety and suffering of workers. At the same time, he has had the military lead the rescue and sent hundreds of troops in an attempt to present them as indispensable and justify the billions invested in their

continued deployment.

For the families and all witnesses, a clear contrast has emerged between the secrecy, sluggishness and irresoluteness of the official response and the brave and selfless offers from miners who arrived from nearby regions since the first day to dive in and rescue their fellow workers, insisting that they “know the grounds.”

The frequent mining disasters and, above all, the homicidal policy of letting COVID-19 run rampant and kill hundreds of thousands of workers demonstrates that capitalism, which places profits above all other concerns, sees workers as expendable. AMLO, every political party, corporation and all the trade unions in Mexico are staunch defenders of capitalism and its nation-state system, which hampers every major effort for international scientific cooperation.

A “no repetition” policy for the criminal carnage in the mines and other workplaces can only be applied if these capitalist institutions are swept aside and the entire global economy, which is already connected by vast supply chains, is brought under the control of the working class organized democratically under a socialist program.



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