

REPORT

Glencore - a Swiss multinational and its dirty methods

Swiss Coalition Against Glencore – Resistencia Activa YA! - June 2025

Introduction

Glencore, with headquarters in Switzerland, is one of the world's largest diversified natural resources companies (Glencore, 2024). Originally a trading company, Glencore merged with mining company Xstrata in May 2013, expanding its business across the entire value chain, from extraction and processing to marketing and trading (Glencore - a critical fact sheet, n.d.; Le business des matières premières explose et la Suisse en profite, n.d.). It is now present in over 35 countries, with more than 150,000 employees and subcontractors, and has become one of the world's largest producers and distributors of copper and cobalt, as well as being active in other metals such as zinc, nickel and aluminium (Glencore, 2024). The group mines copper in South America, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Australia, and cobalt in the DRC, Australia, Canada and Norway (Glencore, 2024). The company is also a major coal producer and trader, with mines in Australia, Africa, Canada and South America (Glencore, 2024). Finally, the company is active in the oil sector as one of the world's leading traders of crude oil, refined products and natural gas (Glencore, 2024) and private debtor.

Glencore establishes itself in these countries through concessions (public contracts), which allow private companies (concessionaires) to exploit natural resources in exchange for royalties paid to the state holding the monopoly on the natural resource (licensor). The contracts are often unbalanced, with Glencore using negotiators to pay bribes to the leaders of the countries concerned, in order to gain a foothold under conditions that are highly advantageous for Glencore and highly problematic for civil society and the environment in the contracting country. Royalties are shares in the profits from the mine and must be paid back to the grantor, with a view to achieving the socio-economic development of the local communities directly affected by the operation of the mine, but also to contribute to the creation of public infrastructure.

Sources:

- <https://www.24heures.ch/les-accords-secrets-de-glencore-au-congo-449028100135>
- <https://geologie.wallonie.be/home/thematiques-sous-sol/exploitations-souterraines/mines-concedees/concessions-minieres.html>
- <https://afrewatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Redevance-miniere.pdf>

Glencore is known for its illegal practices, including allegations of corruption, human rights abuses and environmental pollution and destruction. Indeed, with 71 allegations of human rights abuses in 2023, Glencore ranks second in the world's worst critical minerals companies (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, n.d.; Baxter, n.d.). It is unclear how many more problematic cases do exist related to the role of Glencore as commercial creditor, which we urge to be researched by independent sources.

Case studies on systematic methods done by Glencore

This report brings together and summarises Glencore's illegal practices, which are systematically highlighted in cases in different countries:

1. The Cerrejón open-cast coal mine in the department of La Guajira, Colombia: Tabaco, La Guajira.
2. The Antapaccay copper mine in the province of Espinar in Peru, with the following communities affected: Espinar, Cusco.
3. The Antamina open-cast copper and zinc mine in the Ancash region of Peru, with the following communities affected: San Marcos, Ancash.
4. The Mopani copper mine in Zambia, with the following communities affected: Maamba Town.
5. The MARA (Minera Agua Rica Alumbrera) copper and gold mining project in the province of Catamarca in Argentina, with the following communities affected: Asamblea El Algarrobo, Catamarca, Andalgala.
6. The McArthur River Mine (100% owned by Glencore), Northern Territory, Australia
7. Hail Creek Open Cut Mine (Glencore is 84.67% Shareholder), Queensland, Australia
8. Ravensworth Underground (Glencore subsidiary Resource Pacific Pty used to own 90%), New South Wales, Australia
9. Horne Smelter (100% Owned by Glencore), Quebec, Canada with the community at Rouyn-Noranda being affected.
10. Elk Valley Resources (Glencore is 77% Stakeholder), British Columbia, Canada

Concrete impacts of Glencore's activities

- **Water pollution:** Glencore's mining activities contaminate surface and groundwater by releasing large quantities of minerals and heavy metals. In Colombia, water is polluted by mercury and lead from the Cerrejón coal mine (Baxter, n.d.; Glencore Petition 2021.04.29). In Peru, high concentrations of minerals and heavy metals and spills of toxic substances (lead and arsenic) from the Antapaccay and Antamina mining projects are contaminating the population (Baxter, n.d.; Glencore Petition 2021.04.29). The NGO Red Muqui (2017) examined 27 water and air quality monitoring reports in the mining areas and found 43 cases between 2001 and 2017 of water analysis results exceeding permitted thresholds for heavy metals (arsenic, lead, cadmium, zinc and magnesium). In Zambia, in Kankoyo near the Mopani Copper mine, high concentrations of cadmium and lead measured in the groundwater and pipes make the water unfit for consumption (Glencore Petition 2021.04.29). Australia's McArthur Mines has been problematic for over 20 years ever since the Glencore's takeover; issues include elevated levels of heavy metals in fish, invertebrates and cattle around, misclassification of waste rock as non-acid forming, rapidly oxidising tailings that produce acid that contaminates groundwater (Environment Centre NT, 2021). ¹ In Canada, a 2023 study revealed that the weathering of the waste rock from Elk Valley Resources revealed that selenium levels in British Columbia's Elk River rose by 551% between 1985 and 2022, far exceeding safe water quality guidelines, with concentrations reaching 5.77 parts per billion, despite claims of high-efficiency treatment. This leached selenium not only poses risk to organisms around Elk River/Valley

¹ Environment Centre NT (ECNT), "The shocking history of McArthur River Mine" (timeline), 17 February 2021, web post. Available at: https://www.ecnt.org.au/mcarthur_river_mine_timeline

but also the ecological function of the area (Storb et al., 2023).² Furthermore, there have been reports of selenium contamination in groundwater supplies around the region (Wiebe, 2024).³

- **River diversion and water shortages:** mining activities drain local water resources. For example, the Cerrejón mining operation in Colombia has led to the diversion of 17 watercourses, consuming and contaminating 24 million litres of water a day and causing water scarcity (Baxter, n.d.; Global Legal Action Network, n.d.). The Antamina mine in Peru has caused the drying up of lakes and rivers, sources of water used for subsistence, agricultural irrigation and livestock. In 2003, Glencore Australia, proposed to convert the McArthur operations from underground to open cut, which needed a 5 kilometre diversion of the McArthur River. Despite several legal issues and despite community disapproval, in 2008 the McArthur river was diverted 5.5 kilometres (Environment Defenders Office, 2021).⁴ One of the biggest fears of the community at Boroloola that at some stage McArthur River will take back its old course, creating irreversible damage (Environment Centre NT, 2022).⁵
- **Impact on agriculture and livestock farming:** Lack of water and pollution (water, air and soil) hamper agriculture and livestock farming in regions affected by Glencore's mining operations. In Colombia, the Cerrejón open-cast coal mine emits large quantities of coal particles and fine dust laden with heavy metals, which damages plant growth, affects the health of animals and leads to food shortages for the inhabitants of La Guajira (Global Legal Action Network, n.d.; Baxter, n.d.). The Antamina mine in Peru is also affecting food supplies by polluting the water used for agricultural irrigation. In Zambia, the Mopani Copper mine generates sulphur dioxide emissions, causing acid rain that contaminates the soil and makes farming impossible (Glencore Petition 2021.04.29).
- **Impact on health:** Toxic particles emitted by mining activities seriously affect the health of local populations; respiratory and skin diseases, cancers and malformations are some examples (Glencore Petition 2021.04.29). In Colombia, the Cerrejón mine emits large quantities of hazardous air pollutants (including fine particles, nitrogen oxides, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, sulphur, chromium, copper and zinc), exceeding Colombian standards and WHO guidelines (Baxter, n.d.). These particles are transported over long distances and cause respiratory health problems in hundreds of thousands of people (Baxter, n.d.). In Zambia, respiratory infections and blood poisoning are widely reported in communities near the Mopani mine due to sulphur dioxide emissions (Glencore Petition 2021.04.29). In Quebec, a 2019 report highlighted that children under the age of 9 living near the Horne Smelter, exhibited an arsenic impregnation rate that was 3.7 times higher than a control

² Meryl B. Storb, Ashley M. Bussell, Sara L. Caldwell Eldridge, Robert M. Hirsch, and Travis S. Schmidt, "Growth of Coal Mining Operations in the Elk River Valley (Canada) Linked to Increasing Solute Transport of Se, NO_3^- , and SO_4^{2-} into the Transboundary Koocanusa Reservoir (USA-Canada)", *Environmental Science & Technology*, vol. 57, no. 45 (3 November 2023), pp. 17465-17480. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.est.3c05090>

³ Simon Wiebe, "Contamination of Elk Valley drinking water indicates spread of selenium pollution", 15 August 2024, Wildsight. Available at: <https://wildsight.ca/2024/08/15/contamination-of-elk-valley-drinking-water-indicates-spread-of-selenium-pollution/>

⁴ Environmental Defenders Office, "Supreme Court action over Glencore's McArthur River Mine", 12 February 2021, <https://www.edo.org.au/2021/02/12/supreme-court-action-over-glencores-mcarthur-river-mine/>

⁵ Environment Centre NT, "Australia's Most Toxic Mine: Glencore's McArthur River Mine", YouTube video, 26 April 2022. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMCwsno3OT4>

group (Bilodeau et al, 2019).⁶ Another 2022 report highlighted that residents' risk to cancer over the next 70 year because of the exposure to arsenic and cadmium emissions from the Smelter (Valcke et al., 2022).⁷ Despite this alarming situation, in 2024 Glencore stated that it had reduced its arsenic emissions from 73 ng/m³ in 2022 to 39, which is still 13 times higher than the provincial standard of 3 ng/m³ (Canadian Press, 2025).⁸ A report on the situation in Rouyn-Noranda has been submitted to the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights in March 2025 (Turgeon, 2025).⁹

- **Impact on environment :** The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2015), recognises that climate change is caused by anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases and has profound impacts on a wide variety of human rights, including the rights to life, self-determination, development, food, health, water and sanitation and housing. Furthermore, it disproportionately affects individuals, groups and peoples in vulnerable situations including, women, children, older persons, indigenous peoples, minorities, migrants, rural workers, persons with disabilities and the poor.¹⁰

A 2021 exposé reveals that in Australia, the Ravensworth Underground Mine that was mothballed in 2014, and that has been effectively unchecked and has been leaking methane directly into the atmosphere, equivalent to over 150,000 tonnes of CO₂ pollution every year. From 2014-2021, Ravensworth Underground Mine has emitted the same amount of carbon that taxpayers have spent (\$12-15 million dollars) through the Emissions Reduction Fund (ERF) to sequester carbon elsewhere (Australian Conservation Foundation, 2021).¹¹ In 2023, an investigative report revealed that Australia's Hail Creek mine emitted at least 8,640 tonnes of methane in 16 days, more methane than their official government report said they previously released in an entire year, exposing serious underreporting of climate emissions. The gap between reported and actual methane emissions has major financial consequences, since Glencore Australia stands to gain millions in credits despite

⁶ Frédéric Bilodeau et al., *Rapport de l'étude de biosurveillance menée à l'automne 2019 sur l'imprégnation à l'arsenic de la population du quartier Notre-Dame de Rouyn-Noranda*, octobre 2020 (Rouyn-Noranda, Direction de santé publique de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue, unité de santé environnementale). Available at:

https://www.cisss-at.gouv.qc.ca/partage/BIOSURVEILLANCE/Rapport_biosurveillance_2019_F.pdf

⁷ Mathieu Valcke, Gabriela Ponce and Marie-Hélène Bourgault, *Évaluation du risque cancérogène attribuable aux concentrations d'arsenic et de cadmium dans l'air de la ville de Rouyn-Noranda*, juin 2022 (Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, Direction de la santé environnementale, au travail et de la toxicologie).

⁸ The Canadian Press, "Horne smelter lowered arsenic levels, but locals say it's not enough", 17 April 2025, CTV News. Available at: <https://www.ctvnews.ca/montreal/article/horne-smelter-lowered-arsenic-levels-but-locals-say-its-not-enough/>

⁹ Rodrigue Turgeon, *Access to Justice and Effective Remedies in the Context of Toxics*, submission to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights (MiningWatch Canada), 4 March 2025. Available at: [https://www.miningwatch.ca/2025/3/4/access-justice-and-effective-remedies-context-toxics :contentReference\[oaicite:0\]{index=0}](https://www.miningwatch.ca/2025/3/4/access-justice-and-effective-remedies-context-toxics :contentReference[oaicite:0]{index=0})

¹⁰ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Understanding Human Rights and Climate Change*, submission to the 21st Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP 21), 2015.

¹¹ Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), *Methane: Creating a Stink for Australia and the Climate Crisis*, August 2021 available on

https://canopy.acf.org.au/m/3597a0c0cae850ac/original/Methane_report_Aug_2021.pdf

evidence it may be one of the country's largest methane emitters, credits that would turn into a significant liability if accurate reporting were enforced (Australian Conservation Fund, 2023).¹²

In 2022, a multi-group complaint was lodged with Australian Competition & Consumer Commission (ACCC) and Australian Securities & Investments Commission (ASIC) against Glencore Australia for its misleading claims on climate impact and its behaviour towards Traditional Owners under the Corporations Act 2001. ClientEarth, a United Kingdom based organisation is backing this complaint and urging authorities in the UK to coordinate with ASIC. A parallel complaint was submitted to Ad Standards on behalf of Comms Declare, further demonstrating Glencore's pattern of misrepresentation and greenwashing (Environmental Defender Office, 2022).¹³

Cases of Human rights violations

- **Forced displacement and non-respect of the territorial rights of indigenous communities**: In order to expand their activities, the mines owned by Glencore appropriate the land of local communities, forcing them to move, which constitutes a violation of human rights. For example, in the department of La Guajira in Colombia, 25 indigenous communities have been displaced as a result of the activities of the Cerrejón mine (Censat Agua Viva - Amigos de la Tierra Colombia, 2023). In Peru too, the Antamina mining company has caused the forced displacement of indigenous families living on land ceded to the company, and the Antapaccay company has forcibly invaded the lands of the Alto Huarca community, Espinar - Cusco to remove land and thus divert the course of the Jutumayo river, taking water that is essential for feeding and farming people and animals (Briceno 2014, Kang 2012, Gil Ramón 2020; Glencore Petition 2021. 04.29).
- **Violent repression against members of civil society opposing mining projects**: When local communities oppose or demonstrate against mining projects, violent repression has been reported, involving paramilitary forces, the army, local police or mining company security services (Glencore Petition, 2021.04.29). Anti-mining activists face death threats, armed attacks and even assassinations (Glencore Petition, 2021.04.29). In Colombia, mining companies affiliated to Glencore are accused of collaborating with paramilitary groups, and agreements have allegedly been reached with state security forces to guarantee the protection of mining sites (Glencore Petition, 2021.04.29). In the case of the Antamina mining company in Peru, human rights defenders protesting have been prosecuted for absurd offences, banned from work and threatened with death. Peru's National Human Rights Coordinator reported human rights violations, mistreatment and torture committed by the police against the population during a demonstration in 2020 in Espinar (Peru) (Glencore Petition, 2021.04.29).
- Glencore denies the accusations and complaints lodged against it and does not comply with court rulings. For example, the company has repeatedly ignored orders from the Colombian Supreme Court to improve conditions in the area around the Cerrejón mine (Baxter, n.d.). In Peru, complaints of

¹² Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), *Annual Australian Methane Plume Summary: 2023, available on <https://canopy.acf.org.au/m/4168f35f55ae5033/original/Methane-plume-analysis.pdf>

¹³ Environmental Defenders Office (EDO), “EDO assists clients to call out mining giant Glencore for potential greenwashing”, 8 September 2022, web post. Available at: <https://www.edo.org.au/2022/09/08/edo-assists-clients-to-call-out-mining-giant-glencore-for-potential-greenwashing/>

violations of the right to health and human dignity against the Antamina mining company are not taken seriously by the authorities, which declare them to be unfounded. Another mechanism used by Glencore to circumvent environmental or human rights protection measures imposed by local governments is to sue for lost profits (Baxter, n.d.). Glencore has, for example, won an investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) case relating to its coal mines against Colombia, which must compensate the company for almost US\$20 million, and still has two other cases pending (Glencore - a critical fact sheet, n.d.).

- Although the company has made significant annual profits, for example reaching \$34.1 billion in 2022, social conditions and poverty rates in the communities where it operates are rarely improved (Denina et al., 2023; Baxter, n.d.). Communities and countries do not benefit from Glencore's profits because the company avoids taxes and other social contributions. For example, Zambia would have had to collect up to US\$102 million a year in additional taxes on income from the Mopani Copper mine (quantitative tax analysis by OXFAM over the period 2011-2018) (Potential Corporate Tax Avoidance in Zambia's Mining Sector?, 2021; Glencore - a critical fact sheet, n.d.). In 2020, Glencore was fined US\$13 million for tax evasion (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, n.d.; Glencore - a critical fact sheet, n.d.). Financial irregularities have also been noted in Colombia (Glencore - a critical fact sheet, n.d.).
- Glencore is also facing corruption charges in the UK, US and Brazil related to its operations in five African countries, for which it pleaded guilty to transnational bribery in 2022 in the US, UK and Brazilian courts (Baxter, n.d.; Glencore - a critical fact sheet, n.d.). A US official involved in the investigations said, based on his team's findings, that "paying bribes was part of the corporate culture. The attitude was to win contracts at any cost". Glencore paid bribes over 10 years to at least 8 countries, including some of the poorest in the world: Brazil, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, South Sudan and Venezuela. It has also deliberately manipulated prices in the US fuel oil market to gain financial advantage. If Glencore's corrupt and price manipulative activities continue in developing countries, this will increase the challenges of governance and reduce public revenues. Not to mention that, given the scale of its activities, Glencore is preventing the vital global transition to low-carbon energy sources.

Source : <https://resourcegovernance.org/articles/apres-une-decennie-marquee-par-la-corruption-glencore-besoin-doperer-un-profound-changement>

- Glencore has also seems to maliciously undermine its mining security bonds with respective governments. In the case of McArthur Mines, Australia, despite ministerially approved expansion of the mine's waste rock dump, open-cut pit and amended mining management plan (Thompson, 2023),¹⁴ Glencore ironically, reduced its the environment security bond from AUD\$520 million to AUD\$400 million and managed to eventually increased to AUD\$476 million (Environmental Defender Office, 2023).¹⁵ This becomes even more dubious since Glencore seeks to extend its mining operation until

¹⁴ Jesse Thompson, "Dispute about McArthur River Mine's environmental security bond reaches the Northern Territory Supreme Court", 17 February 2023, ABC News. Available at:

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-02-17/mcarthur-river-mine-supreme-court-case-darwin/101985798>

¹⁵ Environmental Defenders Office (EDO), "McArthur River Mine ruling highlights significant flaws in NT mining and environmental laws", 21 April 2023, web post. Available at:

<https://www.edo.org.au/2023/04/21/mcarthur-river-mine-ruling-highlights-significant-flaws-in-nt-mining-and-environmental-laws/>

2048, after which it claims there will be need for ‘proactive monitoring and reactive monitoring’ for a 1000 years more (Davidson, 2017)¹⁶ making the bond ‘grossly insufficient to rehabilitate the site, with an independent review estimating the clean-up bill would be upwards of \$1 billion’ (Environmental Defenders Office, 2021).¹⁷ For Canada’s Elk Valley Resources, a privately commissioned report estimates that a minimum cost of CAD\$ 6.4 billion will be required to address rising selenium levels, without factoring in land reform, revegetation, biodiversity commitments, aquifer remediation, and other water quality concerns. This is especially concerning since only CAD\$ 1.9 billion has so far been committed as reclamation security (Johnson, 2024).¹⁸

Conclusion

Switzerland is a leader on the international commodities market, thanks to its advantageous tax system, low levels of regulation and strong financial centre (La Suisse, plaque tournante des matières premières, n.d.). In fact, two-thirds of the international trade in base metals passes through Switzerland, and in 2016, one-third of the world's traded oil was bought and sold in Geneva (Le business des matières premières explose et la Suisse en profite, n.d.). Giants like Glencore generate billions, benefiting the Swiss economy through taxes and dividends, while the countries of extraction, which are often plagued by corruption and tax evasion, reap few benefits (Le business des matières premières explose et la Suisse en profite, n.d.; La Suisse, plaque tournante des matières premières, n.d.; Glencore récompense ses actionnaires et le fisc suisse en profite - Le Temps, 2018; 20 minutes, 2023). By hosting these multinationals, Switzerland bears a political responsibility for the imbalances and resource curse it is helping to perpetuate (Public Eye, 2014).

- Switzerland must ensure that OECD guidelines are upheld and that Switzerland is pro-actively ensuring that systematic methods to access natural resources, such as linked to environmental destruction, oppression of local communities and corruption.
- We urge all countries that gave concessions to Glencore to demand an upholding of OECD guidelines and ensure international standards on prior consent and environmental protection are met.
- We demand that Glencore has to be held responsible and fully regenerate soils and waters in destroyed landscapes, pay reparations to local communities suffering from the contamination used and repression received, for mines that Glencore has partially or fully owned, now or in the past.

¹⁶ Helen Davidson, “Glencore document suggests mine site could revert to NT before rehabilitation complete”, 25 August 2017, *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/aug/25/glencore-document-suggests-mine-site-could-revert-to-nt-before-rehabilitation-complete>

¹⁷ Environmental Defenders Office, “Supreme Court action over Glencore’s McArthur River Mine”, 12 February 2021, <https://www.edo.org.au/2021/02/12/supreme-court-action-over-glencores-mcarthur-river-mine/>

¹⁸ Gordon J. Johnson, Burgess Environmental Ltd., *Review of Reclamation Security Addressing Selenium Contamination Teck Coal’s Elk Valley Mines*, final report, March 2024, p. X. Available at: https://wildsight.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/2024-03-18-Teck-Coal-Final-Report_Reduced_Cover-Letter.pdf

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Glencore - a critical fact sheet

Does Cerrejón always win? Between corporate impunity for human rights violations and the search for comprehensive reparation in times of transition, Censat Agua Viva - Amigos de la Tierra Colombia, Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular/Programa Por la Paz- Cinep/PPP

Petition launched at the Glencore 2021 AGM on 29th of April 2021 Urgent need for profound changes in the behaviour of Glencore on human rights and environmental impacts

Exclusive: Glencore, Chad creditors agree in principle on terms of debt treatment by Andrea Schalal, Reuters. November 11 2022 <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/exclusive-glencore-chad-creditors-agree-principle-terms-debt-treatment-source-2022-11-10/>

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https://canopy.acf.org.au/m/3597a0c0cae850ac/original/Methane_report_Aug_2021.pdf

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