

Trudeau Enables Corporate Canada to Exploit Ethiopia's Minerals

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The Federal government wants Canadian corporations to profit from Ethiopia's minerals.

During his recent trip to the Horn of Africa country Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced negotiations on a Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (FIPA). As I detailed in this [article](#), bilateral investment treaties with African countries are overwhelmingly designed to solidify the position of Canadian mining interests.

Alongside the Prime Minister, the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service (TCS) deployed a week-long "Business Mission to Ethiopia." Mining was one of three industries cited in their release about the mission. TCS officials regularly assist mining firms with market assessments, problem-solving, contacting local officials, etc. "[The TCS](#) plays a pretty big role," explained Ben Chalmers, senior vice-president Mining Association of Canada in April. Trade commissioners "stand behind us and give us the additional credibility that being associated with the Government of Canada abroad brings."

On other occasions in recent years Ottawa has shown interest in shaping Ethiopia's burgeoning mining sector. International trade minister Jim Carr [met Ethiopia's](#) Minister for Mining at the 2019 Prospectors & Developers Association of Canada conference in Toronto. In 2016 Global Affairs Canada launched a \$12.5 million "[Strengthening](#) Education in Natural Resource Management in Ethiopia", which was designed "to improve the employability of people ... in natural resource fields like geology, mining and engineering. It works through universities and technical institutes to improve the quality of programs, align them more closely with the needs of the private sector."

Concurrently, Global Affairs put up [\\$15.3 million](#) for a unique five-year collaboration between the Canadian International Resources and Development Institute (CIRDI) and Ethiopia's Ministry of Mines. That initiative was to modernize licensing system and includes support for a geological survey. CIRDI and the Ministry of Mines also collaborated on a short marketing booklet titled "[5 reasons](#) Ethiopia is the mining investment destination you've been looking for", which describes "Ethiopia's virtually untapped, diverse and vast mineral resources." It also lauds "improving government policies and regulations" that have put Ethiopia "on the radar screen of international mining investors."

Two weeks ago, CIRDI Director Isabeau Vilandre and Ethiopia's Minister for Mining participated in the African Mining Indaba conference in Cape Town, South Africa. According to the event publicity, it was a "[presentation](#) on opportunities in the Ethiopian mining sector and its critical role in the country's home-grown economic reform."

Housed at the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University and Polytechnique Montréal, CIRDI was established by the Stephen Harper government to advance Canada's massive international mining sector. In 2012 the Canadian International Development Agency put up [\\$25 million](#) for CIRDI, which then International Development Minister Julian Fantino told a Mining Association of Canada meeting would "[be your](#) biggest and best ambassador."

At the end of November Ethiopia announced new mining regulations. A Financial Post story headlined "[Ethiopia](#) vows to remove barriers to investment in mining" lauded the Canadian backed mining legislation. The story noted, "Ethiopia's current law guarantees the government just a 5% minimum equity stake in projects - less than in many African countries."

Canadian companies have shown interest in Ethiopia. The President & CEO of the Canadian Council on Africa(CCAfrica), a corporate lobby group, [visited](#) Addis Ababa recently to meet the Minister of Mines. Ethiopia's state-owned airline sponsored and participated in CCAfrica's "Unleashing Canadian Mining Ecosystem" conference in January, marketing a regular flight between Toronto and Addis Ababa to the extractivist crowd. (At the start of the month CCAfrica and CIRDI announced a "[Strategic Partnership](#)".)

Canadian firms are exploring a number of projects in a country that's begun to throw its territory open to foreign mining firms. Vancouver based East Africa Metals has three gold and precious polymetallic licenses in the country.

On its site CIRDI lists "[Who Benefits](#)" from its project in Ethiopia. It claims the "Ultimate" beneficiaries are "the citizens of Ethiopia." Justin Trudeau would make a similar claim about his push for a bilateral investment treaty and Ottawa's mining projects in Ethiopia. It wouldn't be true. He wants corporate Canada to profit from Ethiopia's resources.

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