

BUSINESS INSIDER

Nobel Peace Prize winners take home first medal made from ethical gold



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By Sebastien Malo

NEW YORK (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - When the winners of this year's Nobel Peace Prize proudly receive their gold medal at an award ceremony on Thursday, a group of Colombian miners will also take pride in the event with the presentation of first Nobel medal made from ethical gold.

A team of miners from the Colombian town of Íquira in the nation's southwest province of Huila have supplied the gold for the prestigious award from a mine certified as ethical.

The medal was the result of the Norwegian Mint, which produces the medallion, joining forces with Colombia-based nonprofit the Alliance for Responsible Mining to highlight the problems faced by small-scale miners in poor parts of the world.

"We feel very proud to know the Nobel Prize has been made with material that comes from here, from our region, and it's a very ethical and just material," Jose Ignacio Perez, a miner at the Íquira Cooperative, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The medallion will be presented in Oslo to the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet, the mediators credited with saving a country on the brink of civil war in the wake of the Arab Spring.

The 150 grams of 18-carat gold in the 63-millimeter medal comes from the Iquira Cooperative which was awarded its Fairmined certification for meeting strict requirements on responsible practices, environmental protection and social development.

The Fairmined certification aims at reducing the harmful impact of illegal mining in mineral-rich developing countries.

The production of gold has been linked to labor abuses, including forced and child labor, as well as forced displacement and environmental degradation, according to U.S.-based labor rights group Verité.

Gold mining is a crucial source of income for many communities in Latin America, Africa and Asia and about 90 percent of the world's gold miners work in artisanal and small-scale mines, often facing difficult conditions.

The awarding of a Nobel Peace Prize made from ethical gold could prove a watershed moment for the ethical gold cause, said Jeff Trexler, associate director of Fordham University's Fashion Law Institute in New York City.

Trexler compared it with the release of Hollywood blockbuster "Blood Diamond", starring Leonardo DiCaprio, which chronicled how gemstones financed war in Sierra Leone and has been credited with raising awareness about conflict minerals.

In New York City, metalsmith and designer Erin S. Daily, 40, said she ordered her first batch of Fairmined gold two years ago, and now mostly purchases the gold to craft her fine jewelry and other artisanal products.

"Knowing what I know about the horrors of industrial mining and artisanal mining, it's just always weighed very heavily on me that I didn't always have access to 'clean green metal'," she said.

"To me it's very important that I use materials that are traceable and that is as environmentally sustainable as possible."

Susan Scafidi, the Fashion Law Institute's founder and academic director, said there is also powerful symbolism in the move by the Nobel Prize administrators toward ethical gold.

"The Nobel Peace Prize is incredibly influential, and it doesn't make sense to place a role model on a dirty pedestal," she said.

(Reporting by Sebastien Malo, Editing by Belinda Goldsmith; Please credit the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the charitable arm of Thomson Reuters, that covers humanitarian news, women's rights, trafficking, corruption and climate change. Visit www.trust.org)

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