



CORDILLERA PEOPLES ALLIANCE

For the Defense of the Ancestral Domain and for Self-Determination



13 November 2012

Statement on Mines UNSafety 2012

RESIST UNSAFE AND DESTRUCTIVE MINING! DEFEND OUR LAND, LIFE AND ENVIRONMENT!

Mining plunder and massive violation of people's rights persists in Northern Luzon. From reef to ridge, people are struggling to defend their land and resources and assert human rights in the face of a worsening mining situation under PNoy, whose administration practically sustained the same policies and programs of the past Arroyo regime. Vast tracts of land and shorelines are fast degrading with the relentless mining plunder, causing irreversible environmental destruction, community displacement, human health hazards, loss of livelihood, food insecurity, loss of lives, militarization and human rights violations. Mining operations violate indigenous peoples' inherent right to ancestral land and resources, self-determined development, right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent and right to self-determination, while mineworkers are continuously exposed to hazardous working conditions and continue to suffer from unjust labor practices.

The Cordillera is the watershed cradle of Northern Luzon, yet remains a mining haven for foreign and local mining companies. Sixty-six percent of the Cordillera is covered with various mining applications, with the persistence of large mining operations in Benguet. Six of national government's 23 priority projects are located in the Cordillera: the Teresa Gold and Far South East Projects (Lepanto Consolidated Mining Corporation and Gold Fields), Santo Tomas II Copper Extension (Philex Mining Group), Itogon Suyoc Project, Balatoc Tailings Project (Benguet Corporation) and the Batong Buhay Project in Kalinga. In Mankayan, the communities' barricade is now on its 11th month, resisting the Lepanto's expansion operations and South African Goldfields' drilling. In Itogon, communities are barricading the entry of Gold Creek Mining company in Ucab and the commencement of Benguet Corporation's Tailings Pond Recovery Project where tailings deposits in Tailings Dams 1 and 2 are to be re-processed and dumped in Tailings Dam 4. Still in Benguet, the Philex Tailings Pond 3 (TP3) failure and collapse last August resulted in the release of over 20 million metric tons of mine waste into the Balog and Agno Rivers, adversely impacting on the health and livelihood of affected communities and endangering the lives of its mineworkers. The amount of tailings discharged from the TP3 is 1300 percent higher than the 1.6 million cubic meters of tailings released during the Marcopper disaster in Marinduque in 1996. CPA, KATRIBU Indigenous Peoples Partylist and Amianan Salakniban led an Environmental and Social Investigation Mission on the TP3 failure. The Philex mine spill disaster could have been avoided if only Philex has decommissioned the TP3 whose lifespan ended as early as 2010.

In Ilocos region, offshore magnetite mining operations of Colossal Mining Corp., Altamina Exploration Resources, Inc. and the Minprocess Group along the coasts of Pangasinan, La Union, Ilocos Sur and Ilocos Norte continue to destroy aqua-marine life affecting the fishing and agricultural livelihood of at least 30 municipalities in the entire region. Communities and indigenous peoples living in Quirino, Cervantes and Santa in Ilocos Sur, and Carasi and Adams in Ilocos Norte are battling mining exploration and applications, apart from bearing the impact of Lepanto tailings for communities that are situated along the Abra river in Ilocos Sur.

In Cagayan Valley province, approved offshore magnetite mining projects cover at least 139,060 hectares, with applications covering an area of 13,630 hectares. Chinese and Taiwanese mining companies are resorting to using local permits while using heavy equipment and gigantic separation plants to facilitate extraction of beach and river sand. Companies Lianxing, SanYou, YinYing, Huaxia are extracting sand on beaches and in fishing villages even if there is strong opposition from the people. Aragorn Coal Resources Inc. operates a coal mining project in Isabela and, together with Monte Oro, is exploring for gas and oil covering 748,000 hectares in Cagayan Valley. Gold and copper mining operations and applications are continuing in Nueva Vizcaya, Isabela and Cagayan by different local and transnational mining companies such as Oceana Gold, Coobalah Mining Corp and others. Magnetite sand mining along the coasts of Ilocos and Cagayan regions results in the displacement of communities due to the erosion of coastal lines. In La Union alone, affected communities lamented that some 13 hectares of land along the shoreline has been washed out since Anglo American operated magnetite mining in the area in the 1970s.

In the labor front, workers experience unjust labor practices with their safety not ensured while on duty, and they are not being paid for the extension of work hours. Since the first mine spill in August 1, Philex has stopped its Padcal mine operations and required its mineworkers to perform even more hazardous work in plugging the breach in the TP3 and for a clean-up of the Balog river, regardless of age and health conditions. The EIM conducted on October 27 reports that two workers died and two more were injured due to the hazardous work at the TP3. They are also exposed to hazardous chemicals like xanthates and frothers and an accident-prone environment. Overtime work and night shift differentials are not being paid.

Community people are now being asked to render free service in the name of "one team, one Philex". The workers should be fairly treated, paid well and protected from occupational health hazards.

Mining and Militarization

Under PNoy's Oplan Bayanihan, we have witnessed continuing rights violations in Northern Luzon. Leaders of people's organizations and networks like Defend Ilocos, Amianan Salakniban and Save the Valley, Save the People continue to be vilified and attacked as military targets. The militarization of communities and the filing of criminal charges against members and leaders of people's organizations continue, while the rampant vilification of anti-mining activists and organizations could lead to extrajudicial killings. Clearly, Oplan Bayanihan is nothing but a continuation of Oplan Bantay Laya.

Under the Arroyo regime where the Philippine mining industry was liberalized, indigenous peoples' collective and individual human rights were violated. Right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) was manipulated by no less than the companies, in cahoots with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP); and intense militarization through the Oplan Bantay Laya I and II, resulting to extrajudicial killings of community folk, indigenous activists like Markus Bangit and Alyce Claver; the enforced disappearance of James Balao, and many other rights violations that also resulted in further socio-economic marginalization of indigenous peoples. In Mankayan, let us not forget that Captain Danilo Lalin of the 50th Infantry Battalion (IB) and now the 86th IB remains scot free and unpunished even with rape and sexual abuse he committed to two young girls from Cabiten, a community affected by the operations of Lepanto Consolidated Mining Co.

The tandem of large mining and militarization is rife throughout Northern Luzon and other indigenous peoples' territories. Clearly, human rights violations are committed where large mines are. Not one case of human rights violation is solved, which the PNoy administration should have done if he were serious in his "daang matuwid" slogan. "Daang matuwid" could not be realized if cases of human rights violations remain unsolved, and impunity remains especially in mining-affected communities.

Our Urgent Demands

Behind the tandem of mining and militarization is the liberalization of the mining industry which was further strengthened by President Benigno Aquino II when he issued in July this year Executive Order 79 which favors trans-national corporations, denies local government units' right to disallow mining projects, and brazenly ignores people's rights. The government's disregard of people's rights and to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is once again proven in its silence and inaction on the Philex TP3 disaster and the human rights violations we continue to suffer from, when in fact, the Philex TP3 failure has proven again that there is no such thing as "safe and responsible" mining in the current context, contrary to what the government and mining corporations harp on. It remains to be a myth. The government and mining companies' legacy is mining destruction, plunder and human rights violations as seen in the recent Philex mine spill disaster which disproves Philex's claim as an "international model of responsible mining".

The adverse effects of unsafe, destructive and large scale mining are concrete and indisputable. They have resulted in irreparable damage to the natural environment and local agriculture, the economic and even physical displacement of indigenous communities, and the aggravation of climate change impacts. The only justice that can be done is to stop large mining, stop militarization, end impunity, justice to victims of human rights violations and mining plunder, and uphold indigenous peoples' ancestral land rights, and the right to self determination.

We therefore urgently demand for a stop to the plunder of indigenous peoples' ancestral domain, a stop to all 'developmental projects' in ancestral lands, immediate end to widespread militarization in indigenous territories and the rest of Northern Luzon, and rehabilitation and just compensation of communities adversely affected by mining disasters such as those affected by the Philex mine spill and the Lepanto mining operations. We demand for the repeal of the Mining Act of 1995, EO 79 and other mining laws and policies that allows for the plunder of our territories and natural resources. We call on the public to support the People's Mining Bill (HB 4315) for a re-oriented mining industry. We demand the 5th Infantry Division which operates in northern Luzon to respect human rights and stop human rights abuses.

Stop imperialist mining plunder and militarization in northern Luzon!
Defend and preserve our national patrimony against foreign big business plunder!
Assert our right to life, land, culture, food security and genuine development!

Cordillera Peoples Alliance
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