



CORDILLERA PEOPLES ALLIANCE

For the Defense of the Ancestral Domain and for Self Determination

Press Release

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MINING-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES, MINeworkERS EXPOSE MYTH OF MINING SAFETY

In commemoration of Mines Unsafety Week 2011, a People's Forum on Mining was held last Wednesday at the People's park, Baguio City, featuring testimonies from mineworkers of the Lepanto Consolidated Mining Company (LCMCo) and Philex Mines and community representatives from Itogon, Tuba and Mankayan on occupational mining hazards and the impacts of mining operations to the communities. Attended by over 200 people from different municipalities of Benguet and sectors and people's organizations in Baguiod, the forum bore the theme *Defend Our Land and Resources! Stop Imperialist Mining in the Cordillera!*

"It is not true that large-scale mining uplifts our living conditions especially the families of mineworkers. As a former mineworker in Lepanto, I have seen the miserable working conditions of the miners – from exposure to toxic gasses and particles to fatal rock fall accidents. Recently, Lepanto's contractualization scheme is further depriving the miners of benefits and union rights. Miners are forced to work overtime for additional wages to meet their families' daily needs," narrated Vicente Dilem, Kilusang Mayo Uno-Cordillera member and former member of Lepanto Employees Union (LEU), in his testimony.

Dilem's testimony was substantiated by LEU former officer Lon Baday, and Moises Fernandez, Philex Mines worker and member of the Progressive Union of Mine Workers in Philex. According to Baday, an average of 3-5 fatal accidents occur in Lepanto each year while Fernandez mentioned that there is an average of 2-3 monthly accidents took place in Philex from January to October 2011. Fatal accidents are caused by falling rocks inside the mines. Both Baday and Fernandez reiterated that the working conditions of the mineworkers are "hazardous, dangerous and unsafe."

Meanwhile, representatives from mining-affected communities in Itogon, Mankayan and Tuba recounted how mining operations of LCMCo, Philex Mines and Benguet Corp. Inc. made their communities a "no man's land." Albert Diego from Colalo, Mankayan relived the disastrous massive ground subsidence in his community more than ten years ago. "The disaster claimed the life of my *kailian* Pablo Gomez whose body was never found, our gardens lost, and our school totally destroyed. Until today, some of the houses are hanging where the subsidence occurred. In 2009, another subsidence occurred in Poblacion. These show how unsafe our communities have become because of the Lepanto mines," said Diego.

In his testimony, Julio Wais, a resident of Philex, described what became of the place where he grew up. "When I was a child, we used to burn a portion of the mountain (*kaingain*) to prepare the land for planting of crops. Now the mountains have become barren due to the operations of Philex which polluted not just the air but also the soil. We have also experienced a mud slide which we attribute to the deforestation of the forest by Philex Mines, and their underground holes," narrated Wais.

Apart from issues on large-scale mining, there are also pressing issues presently faced by small-scale miners in the region. Some of these were shared in the testimonies of representatives from Ucab, Itogon and Bokod. According to Agosto Matso, member of the Association of Bolo Indigenous Peoples in

Bokod, “Small-scale mining in Bokod is disallowed by the local government claiming that our small-scale mining activities are ‘illegal’. Ironically, we have learned that a lot of big mining companies are processing their mining applications which cover Bokod. These big mining applications should be the ones disallowed as these will surely bring about more destruction in our lands and the environment,” said Matso. In Ucab, Itogon, small-scale mining areas are threatened by Gold Creek, a Korean-owned company that plans to mine the place. David Dalisay from Itogon recounted their community’s recent barricade against the entry of Gold Creek in the area. “We have successfully opposed the open-pit operations of BCI in the 1990s. We continue opposing applications for large-scale mining activities in our land,” said Dalisay.

In a statement, the CPA mentioned that “As we resist large-scale capitalist mining, we promote responsible smallscale mining – that which is community-controlled and managed as additional livelihood in accordance with their collective interests and indigenous resource management systems, using sustainable and viable means of production.”

Further, “As we call for the Mining Act of 1995 to be junked, we support House Bill 4315 or the People’s Mining Bill as an alternative policy to guide the country’s mining industry,” said Santos Mero, CPA Deputy Secretary General. During the forum, the People’s Mining Bill was discussed by Beverly Longid, National Chairperson of Katribu Partylist, as an alternative law which seeks to nationalize the mining industry.

The program was culminated with a symbolic “imprisonment” of Pres. Aquino along with the mining companies Philex Mining Corporation, Benguet Mining Corporation and Lepanto Consolidated Mining Company for their plunder of the land and resources, violations of workers’ rights, and violations of the rights of the indigenous peoples.

Organized by the Cordillera People’s Alliance (CPA), Kilusang Mayo Uno Cordillera, KATRIBU Partylist and Save the Abra River Movement (STARM), the Mines Unsafety activities from November 9-11 aim to inform the public on the impact of corporate mining to indigenous peoples’ ancestral land and resources. # ***Cordillera Peoples Alliance***