

Statement

20 September 2012

Mankayan Communities Steadfast In spite of Rights Violations

The Cordillera Peoples Alliance and BAMPIS Mining Watch strongly condemn the violence committed to Mankayan residents by Lepanto security force and elements of the Philippine National Police (PNP) in a third attempt to demolish the barricade in Sitio Madaymen, Barangay Tabeo at six in the morning of September 17. Save Mankayan Movement (SMM) Vice President Tony Ugalde was handcuffed and arrested during the attempted dispersal. The barricade is now on its 8th month in assertion of indigenous communities' ancestral land rights, and survived earlier attempts of demolition and dispersal in May 25 and July 24, 2012.

Around 300 men, women, elderly and even children were at the barricade at the time of the incident. Towards morning, almost 600 community residents from other Mankayan barangays were at the barricade, in support and solidarity to Tabeo residents, being victims as well of large mining impacts of Lepanto and the impending drilling of Goldfields.

At least 115 PNP elements, 50 Lepanto security guards and 40 members of the Armed Forces nearly swept through the picketline in spite of negotiations by community elders and SMM leaders. Residents sustained wounds and bruises during the attempt to dismantle. On September 19, a SWAT team was also seen in the area.

It is no tea party to sustain a barricade and picket for 8 long months, rain or shine, come peace or tension. The Mankayan people's demand for the pullout of Goldfields and a stop to Lepanto operations must be respected and upheld. While it is true that NCIP and CHR were in Mankayan last September 17 and actually witnessed the people's sacrifice to defend human rights and life itself, they did not do anything to protect the people's rights. Lest they are siding with Lepanto, CHR and NCIP's bias should be for the people. The same goes for the PNP that continues to allow itself to be a State instrumentality violating people's rights. We are enraged and disappointed that while negotiations were ongoing last September 17, the PNP had the temerity to look for another entry to bring in materials and equipment for the demolition. Where is the integrity of these government agencies mandated to uphold and protect indigenous peoples' rights? Is the NCIP, CHR and PNP going to wait for a worst-case scenario before they categorically support the people's demands?

In a desperate effort to dissuade community solidarity and unity, Lepanto even filed some 123 criminal and civil cases to members and officers of SMM. The irony in this is that even the dead, including minors were also named! And while SMM and communities are in a vigil in Madaymen, Lepanto, Goldfields and Crescent are still actively persuading the people to accept the companies' mining interest in the municipality. In Barangay Colalo for instance, Goldfields is conducting sitio consultations for its drilling program. Goldfields has about 6 drilling programs to conduct in this barangay, particularly Sitio Ampontoc.

The people of Mankayan are on guard for any possible retaliation from the company. It is in this regard that we are urgently appealing to the media for public information support. We also appeal to the public to stand behind us in our cause to fight for our remaining lands resources. We are only borrowing these from the future generation, and must thus be nurtured and defended from destructive projects like Lepanto's large mining, and impending mining operations of Goldfields and Crescent. To end the havoc and rights violations wrought by large mining in Lepanto, the solution is for a permanent stop to Lepanto's operations and ban of all mining applications in the area. ***

Agbiag ti Umili ti Mankayan!

Ituloy ti laban para iti daga, biag ken karbengan!

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