



CORDILLERA PEOPLES ALLIANCE

For the Defense of the Ancestral Domain and for Self Determination

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DECOMMISSION PHILEX TP3 AND JUSTLY COMPENSATE, REHABILITATE AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

BAGUIO CITY—In a media briefing today the Cordillera Peoples Alliance and Amianan Salakniban called for the immediate decommissioning of Philex's Tailings Pond 3, and for rehabilitation and just compensation be urgently carried out for affected communities like Itogon, Tuba, and communities downstream of the Agno River, such as Pangasinan, which hosts the San Roque Dam.

“These are our urgent demands. We are also challenging Philex to cooperate, be transparent and immediately open its mining compound and allow concerned organizations like CPA, including the media, to conduct independent fact finding and environmental investigation. With its own disclosure of 20 million metric tons (MMT) of mine tailings released from TP3 since the breach was first reported, the DENR should immediately conduct tests and analyse the samples it obtained, disclose the process and publicise the chemicals present,” said CPA deputy secretary general Santos Mero. DENR earlier disclosed its chemical testing was not done because its machine broke down, but this is not an excuse.

Mero explained that unless TP3 is decommissioned, the San Roque Dam downstream of the Agno River will become the catch basin and this poses a serious threat. “Imagine all the mine tailings and sediments that will accumulate at SRD,” he said. As early as August 3, a NAPOCOR hydrologist observed the discoloration of water coming out of the turbines of San Roque Dam when his team inspected the dam. “It was like muck (burak), a dirty grayish material that did not seem to mix well with water,” he said.

In the media briefing, geologist Ric Saturday Jr. of AGHAM clarified that contrary to Philex's description, the materials discharged from TP3 resulting from the dam failure are not simply “sediments” but mine tailings, and that the events are not simply “sediments discharge incidents.” Saturday added that as per MGB report, the 20 million MT mine tailings released since August roughly translates to 400,000 metric tons/day, assuming 50 days since the first leak on August 1. “Philex tailings spill is 47 times the garbage generated in Metro Manila (at 8,500 metric tons/day) and 12.5 times larger than the Marcopper tragedy in 1993 in Marinduque. MGB itself disclosed that the Marcopper tailings spill is 1.6 million metric tons.” He explained further that the 20 M metric tons mine tailings is 14 times the average milling rate of Philex (at 27,500 metric tons/day), which would translate to 16,667 mt/hour, or, imagine 1,667 dump truck loads (at 10 mt each) of mine tailings every hour! Saturday further explained that 20 million metric tons is equivalent to 20 billion kilograms, and, if one was to dump all these in one hectare of land or open space, the mine tailings would be 800 meters thick.

“If structural and foundation failure caused the breach in the penstock, these could have been prevented through periodic monitoring and maintenance, ground monitoring and treatment—and Philex actually affords to do all these,” Saturday explained.

Also present during the briefing was Engr. Vergel Aniceto, Fourth Nominee of KATRIBU Indigenous Peoples Partylist. He reiterated that Philex must pay its dues and taxes to Tuba and Itogon municipalities, where its operations are. In fact, Tailings Dam 1, 2 and 3 are all located in Itogon.

Itogon Mayor Oscar Camantiles said the TP3 tailings leaks have affected the livelihood of more than 34 families living downstream of the Agno river in sitios Pangbasan, Pao and Daynet.

“While Philex started operations in 1958, it was only in 1967 that its Tailings Dam 1 operated. DENR records say that its useful life is only 10 years but it took 14 years before Philex decommissioned TP1 in 1981. The

Tailings Pond 2 was commissioned in the same year. In January 1992, the dam walls of Philex TP2 collapsed because of foundation failure, resulting to the release of 80 million metric tons of tailings,” explained Aniceto.

While Philex boasts of being an international model of responsible mining, being awarded an International Standard Organization (ISO) 14001 certification, the TP3 dam failure, is a clear account of Philex’s negligence and unsafe practices. In fact, it shatters the myth of safe and responsible mining harped by large mining companies. ***

References:

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