



CORDILLERA PEOPLES ALLIANCE

For the Defense of the Ancestral Domain and for Self Determination

November 8, 2011

The Cordillera Peoples Alliance issues this statement on the occasion of MINES UNSAFETY 2011

SHATTERING THE MYTH OF SAFE AND RESPONSIBLE MINING

More than 10 years ago, a massive sinking, landslide and ground subsidence occurred in Colalo, Mankayan, where Lepanto Mining has operated for more than 70 years. On that fateful day of July 26, a large portion of Colalo Proper above the quarry site sunk and eroded, totally damaging the elementary school, four homes, a portion of the road, several farms and orchards and other improvements. The sinking affected at least 10 hectares of land. Local resident Pablo Gomez, 36 years old, married and with five children, was buried alive while transporting school facilities to higher ground. Residents immediately searched for Gomez for over a week, but Gomez' body was never found. Edna*, a local resident, shares that the 1999 Colalo sinking remains fresh in her memory. "Wherever I am—in my vegetable garden at work or elsewhere—I am never at peace knowing that anytime, another disaster will happen." In 2000, other sinking areas included Tabak, Bulalacao and Sapid, while fissures yearly occur at the Mankayan-Cervantes Road.

In June 2009, the sinking and subsidence took place in another barangay—Poblacion—affecting more than 10 households. At least 10 meters had sunk near the premises of St. Joseph Parish and the main grounds of the Mankayan National Highschool. With the continuing sinking and landslides, the provincial government had declared the municipality in a state of calamity. In April of that year, a portion of the slaughter house in Brgy. Poblacion sunk after fissures gradually formed. LCMC was even in hot waters recently because of the asbestos dumping from its head office in Makati in Brgy. Sapid, as early as 2007.

When supertyphoons Ondoy and Pepeng hit Northern Luzon in October 2009, the Cordillera was badly affected. The damage, destruction and deaths were immense in the mined out communities of Itogon, where Benguet Corporation has operated for over 100 years, and in Tublay, where the Sto. Niño mines once operated. Now, coupled with the impacts of the climate crisis, danger looms in these mined-out areas, and those where active operations are.

Long years of open pit mining and underground bulk mining have also resulted in adverse impacts to local agriculture, people's livelihood sources, and the environment. Lepanto's unhampered disposal of toxic mine waste directly and indirectly into the Abra River has been a serious problem of communities along the Abra River, which connects the four provinces of Abra, Ilocos Sur, Benguet and Mountain Province.

Findings of two Environmental Investigatory Missions (EIMs) carried out in 2002 and 2003 in these provinces by the Save the Abra River Movement (STARM) and CPA clearly showed decreased agricultural yield, deterioration of riparian life, death of domestic animals and major disasters such massive ground sinking and subsidence, death of crops due to Lepanto's copper ore dryer due to the high levels of toxic waste dumped into the Abra River. In 1993, another spillway collapse following a typhoon was documented. In July 1999, heavy rains triggered a major mass movement involving 14 hectares in Colalo, Mankayan. The Colalo Elementary School was buried and 1 resident died. Lepanto had been quarrying the area in connection with the construction of Tailings Dam 5A. This disaster was documented by the National Institute for Geological Studies based in the University of the Philippines.

In other parts of the country, let us not forget the experience of Marinduque in 1996, where the Marcopper mining disaster inundated the Boac River with tons of toxic mine tailings, inflicting health, economic and environmental hazards to the locals.

Mining Plunder and Violation of IPs' Ancestral Land Rights

Sixty-six per cent of the Cordillera is covered with various mining applications, as large mining continues to operate 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), Santo Tomas II Copper Extension (Philex Mining Group), Itogon Suyoc Project, Balatoc Tailings Project (Benguet Corporation) and the Batong Buhay Project in Kalinga.

While some mining TNCs have temporarily exited the Cordillera due to people's opposition, new ones have made their presence known. These include South Africa- based Goldfields (Mankayan, Benguet), Canadian companies Solfotara (Kibungan and Bakun in Benguet; Abra), Columbus and Magellan in Bokod, Benguet, Olympus Pacific in Abra and Philippine Metals Canada in Tubo, Abra; Australian mine Royalco and Brazilian mine Vale both in Bakun, Benguet, and the US company Malibato-Phelps Dodge in the provinces of Kalinga, Mountain Province and Abra. Vale is the world's largest producer of iron ore and a leading producer of nickel and copper.

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. The tandem of large mining and militarization is rife throughout the region and other indigenous peoples' territories. Clearly, human rights violations are committed where large mines are.

With the surge of new mining applications in the country, especially in indigenous territories, and the continuation of State's policy of terrorism now called Oplan Bayanihan, it is clear that Pres. Aquino is no different from Arroyo. The benchmark by which PNoy could have proven his sincerity to the people is erstwhile pronouncements is the Indigenous Peoples Agenda which was officially received by Malacañang in August 5, 2010 and thru his personal emissary on August 9, 2010. But PNoy has not responded to any of the issues and demands stated therein, which includes a stop to the plunder of indigenous peoples' ancestral domain, a stop to all 'developmental projects' in ancestral lands and immediate end to widespread militarization in indigenous territories.

Our Calls

The adverse effects of 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, and uphold indigenous peoples' ancestral land rights, and the right to self determination.

Thus, the Cordillera mass movement will persist in the assertion of our people's right to to ancestral domain and self determination through genuine regional autonomy. 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. #

Enough of the Disasters and Human Rights Violations!
Stop Imperialist Mining in the Cordillera!

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