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Agenda Item 3 (a): Economic and Social Development

By: Mr. Windel Bolinget, Cordillera Peoples Alliance

Madam Chairperson, ladies and gentlemen:

We welcome this particular agenda on economic and social development. We support the report and recommendations of the Expert Group meeting on extractive industry, corporate responsibility and indigenous peoples. The agenda reflects the urgency to address the serious impacts of extractive industries to the world's indigenous peoples.

In spite of the widespread nationwide opposition to large scale mining, the Philippine government under President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has aggressively liberalized the mining industry to attract foreign mining investments. It issued policies, such as the National Minerals Policy and Mineral Action Plan, to accelerate the implementation of the Philippine Mining Act of 1995 resulting in the rapacious plunder of ancestral lands and destruction of the environment of indigenous peoples. It's claims of promoting sustainable and responsible mining and development has been exposed as a barefaced lie.

Our historic and concrete experience shows that corporate and large scale mining did not push the country's economic development and prosperity. Massive large-scale mining displaced and deprived traditional small-scale miners of inter-generational livelihood, led to the destruction of fertile lands, depletion of water resources, caused environmental and health problems, aggravated global warming and food insecurity. It worsens climate change and climate change further threatens the already vulnerable mining-affected communities. This extractive industry has also been a root cause of militarization and human rights violations as the assertion of our right to self determination and ancestral lands is criminalized. As mining operations are mostly in indigenous territories, indigenous peoples bear the brunt of the destruction of our lands and plunder of our resources. In the Cordillera, river systems were polluted due to toxic mine waste disposal as in the case of the Abra River and Agno River. The social, economic, environmental and human rights impacts becomes more unprecedented if mining applications covering 1.2 million hectares, of the total Cordillera land area of 1.8 million hectares, will be approved, in addition to the areas covered by approved applications and ongoing operations of Lepanto and Philex mining companies. The Cordillera as the watershed cradle of Northern Luzon Philippines is in danger.

Madame Chairperson, it is condemnable that the Philippine government and mining companies only think of their interests by pursuing more massive and destructive mining, instead of addressing first outstanding issues such as rehabilitation of mined-out areas and polluted rivers, compensation of adversely affected communities and sincere recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples over their land and resources, and impacts to climate change. Unless these crucial issues are not seriously addressed, environmental disasters and social problems related to extractive industry will never end.

Madam Chairperson, with sense of urgency, we humbly submit the following recommendations:

1. To recommend a moratorium on large-scale mining and extractive industries in indigenous territories until mechanisms addressing outstanding issues are set, especially on compensation and rehabilitation of devastated communities and the urgent concern on climate change.
2. To recommend that projects affecting indigenous peoples can only be undertaken within the framework of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, especially the recognition of our right to our land and resources; free, prior and informed consent; transparency and accountability of companies and investors.
3. To call for a review and repeal of laws, such as the Philippine Mining Act of 1995, to be consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and reforming the industry.
4. Demilitarize communities threatened and affected by mining projects and investments and stop political persecution of environmental and indigenous activists.

Thank you.