
Philippines: Opposition against mining policy

It is estimated that already 40% of the Philippines territory has been given away under the form of concessions to multinational mining companies. However, this process has not happened without opposition. From the Cordillera region in northern Philippines to the South Eastern region of the Palawan Island, the Subanen, Tagbunau, Pala'wan, Tau't bato and Batak indigenous groups (see WRM bulletins N° 11, 28, 67) have struggled to defend their territories from the pervasive impacts of mining.

This year, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo started a policy of promotion of mining in the country. Within that framework, a national process of consultations was initiated in February in cooperation with the USAID, which has faced strong opposition from several civil society groups gathered in the National Mining Conference (NMC). They have staged a nationwide "fax barrage" on December 3, to express unified opposition to the National Minerals Policy (NMP) Framework and the Philippine Mining Act of 1995.

As they put it, their opposition is based on the following grounds:

- "a. The law is based on an export-oriented economic framework, a policy which remains as a key factor in driving the country's economy to bankruptcy.
- b. The law has opened our mineral wealth to full exploitation by foreign investors, thus surrendering our national patrimony and sovereignty to corporate entities who have the control of capital and technical know-how.
- c. The law is not based on Philippine realities. We are an archipelago with fragile ecosystems and the areas where minerals are located are inhabited mainly by indigenous peoples.
- d. The law does not guarantee the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples to their territories and their right of self-determination.
- e. The law further distorts the development of our economy which could be achieved primarily by strengthening agriculture and undertaking national industrialization instead of just attracting foreign investments for extractive industries like mining."

In this light, they present the following demands:

- "1. Cancel all mining permits already issued and to declare a moratorium on large scale mining activities.
- 2. Formulate a new National Minerals Policy which respects the integrity of the Creation, truly adheres to the principles of sustainable development, clearly defines the role of the mining industry in strengthening the country's economy based on supporting agricultural development and national industrialization, ensure that it respects basic human rights and strengthens democratic processes.

3. Legislate a new mining code based on this new National Minerals Policy.

4. For the MGB [Mines and Geosciences Bureau] improve on their practice of democratic processes: to go through a very thorough process of consultations to ensure that those who have been and will be affected by mining operations are fully consulted, allow the expression of people's sentiments and demands; and that results of consultation be disseminated for comments. We also seek the formation of an inter-sectoral body that will study the impact of mining policies.

5. Recognize and respect indigenous peoples right to land and to self-determination. This should not be diminished when securing permission to access indigenous peoples territories to implement development projects such as mining.

6. For the resolution of outstanding issues of mining-affected communities, (i.e. the clean up of Mogpog and Boac Rivers, conflict between the Subanon peoples in Siocon and TVI, the rights of small scale miners in Diwalwal, Lepanto's pollution of the Abra river, the rehabilitation of open pit mining areas of Benguet Corporation, the cry of the people of Didipio for a people's initiative, the protest of the people against Western Mining Corporation etc.) instead of rushing the approval of a clearly pro-mines industry National Minerals Policy.

7. Conduct a social and environmental impact assessment of almost 8 years of implementation of RA [Republic Act] 7942 and its IRR [Implementing Rules and Regulations]."

They claim: "Let the voices of the people be heard. The strength of a government can only be ensured if it responds to the basic aspirations and demands of the majority who still remain marginalized and oppressed."

Article based on information from: "Urgent Action - 'fax barrage' on Philippines' National Minerals Policy process", 3rd December 2003, <http://www.minesandcommunities.org/Action/action50.htm>