
Philippines: Canadian mining company against indigenous peoples

Even if logging has been the most important direct cause of deforestation in The Philippines archipelago -whose tropical forest area has been dramatically reduced to only 3% of the original cover- mining is also relevant for its depredatory effects. It is estimated that already 40% of the entire territory of the country has been given away by the government under the form of concessions to multinational mining companies. As in many other parts of the world, large scale mining has produced not only environmental but also social negative impacts on local communities and indigenous peoples in the Philippines (see WRM Bulletin 11).

It was recently denounced that members of the Subanen indigenous peoples have suffered violence to the hands of the police and miners of the Canadian company TVI Pacific. The incident took place last September 6th, when a group of fifty Subanen blockaded a road into their ancestral territory in the mountains of Zamboanga del Norte, following which they were attacked by an armed group and beaten with gun butts and canes.

In spite of such violence, the Subanen continue to block the road to prevent TVI from bringing drilling equipment onto the 1,235 acre (500 hectares) site to which they have been claiming ancestral rights since 1992. TVI's proposed mine will cut a deep quarry into the forested mountain and the ore will be processed with cyanide. The indigenous people -who are being supported by religious and civil society groups, local residents, including small-scale miners, and the UK based NGO Survival International- are willing to continue this action, since they have been suffering a continuous process of dispossession of their ancestral lands -which once extended all along Zamboanga peninsula- by settlers and loggers.

They have denounced TVI for its actions of direct and indirect violence against local dwellers in the area since 1996. The company is also accused of violating the 1995 Mining Code, according to which every company is required to obtain the informed consent of affected tribal peoples before initiating new mining projects, as well as the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997, that promises land rights recognition and respect for indigenous peoples. Nothing of this has been adhered to.

The success of the resistance of the Subanen indigenous people is considered very important from a strategic point of view, since it is feared that in case the company manages to continue operating in the area, similar abusive practices may be executed elsewhere in the country. TVI has got land claims covering 2.9 million acres at more than 20 sites in The Philippines.

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