
Multinational mining in The Philippines

A group of forty community activists from around Asia and the Pacific have recently held a meeting in Baguio City to review the impact of mining in the Cordillera region in northern Philippines, home of the Igorot indigenous peoples.

The meeting, that concluded on April 21st., was organized by Friends of the Earth-Philippines and the Mineral Policy Institute of Sydney, Australia. The activists agreed to support each others' struggles for social justice in the wake of an explosion of new mining projects throughout the Asia-Pacific.

Marvic Leonen, Director of Friends of the Earth, Philippines, who was one of the guides, told his guests that worse could well be on the way. "Our government is writing laws that are almost identical to the ones we had in the American colonial period. During that time our people did not have control over their lands. Today the government has given away 40 percent of our entire country to multinational mining campaigns."

An activist from Indonesia, who preferred to remain anonymous, said that some 70 new mining concessions were given out in 1996 alone out of the 233 that have been awarded in the last 30 years, and which have resulted in tremendous environmental and social injustices. For example Rio Tinto, an Anglo-Australian company, was recently caught dumping hundreds of drums of toxic cyanide into the Mahakam river in Kalimantan causing thousands of wild animals to be killed (see WRM Bulletin nr. 8). The experiences of activists from other Indonesian islands like Irian Jaya, Java, Maluku and Sulawesi and from Papua New-Guinea echoed these problems.

Jillian Marsh, an aboriginal activist, warned the other visitors to be wary of companies from Australia, saying that her community had been cheated by uranium mining companies at the Beverly site in South Australia. "We have decided to say no to exploration, no to consultation, no to negotiation. Negotiation is simply an excuse to bluff peoples and to con communities. We are being tricked while our people are being divided by company lies," she said.

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