

The Matrix of the Philippine Mining

“Undangon Ang Mina”

Background

The Philippine archipelago is a mountainous area having approximately 30 million hectares of land. It has 7,101 islands with three major regions- Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. Geologically, the Philippines is a part of the Circum-Pacific Belt of Fire wherein mineral resources are exceptionally abundant. Historically, one of the reasons why the Philippines was a major target of colonial powers in the 15th century (Spanish, Americans and Japanese), is because of its affluence in minerals such as Gold, Copper, Nickel, Silver, Iron and many others. Through centuries, many "mining hotspots" were issued by the Philippine government as "reserved areas" for future exploitation. As a neo-colonized country and a member of the World Trade Organization with a population of 32.9% living below poverty level, the Philippine government is coerced to adhere to neo-liberal policies.

Its adherence to such has been a disaster for both the rural people (indigenous/tribal communities, farmers and fishermen) and the environment (watersheds, farmlands, rain forests, oceans).

History

Mining in the Philippines started in pre-colonial period. In a number of regions in the archipelago, indigenous communities mined for gold, copper and many other minerals for different purposes. Natives from all over the Philippines used gold, pearls, agate and so on, for body ornaments. Gold was also bartered with merchants all over Asia and Europe in the pre-Islamic and Islamic period. It is noted

that many merchants from Luzon (Northern Philippines), Brunei and Jolo traveled continually all throughout Mindanao in search for slaves and gold. However, the first commercial mine was in Benguet, Central Luzon- the Benguet Mining Corporation.

Roughly 400 years ago, the Spaniards took advantage of the affluent mineral resources they can get. In fact, gold was the main reason why Spain colonized the Philippines, mainly for their so called Royal Service. They made a law to inspect the existing minerals in the archipelago and this law was called Inspeccion de Minas.

However, it was the Americans who made strategic steps to exploit the minerals of the Philippines. Implementing a Mining Law in May 1867, they did a geological survey which validated the Philippines as a mineral-rich country. They issued Act 468- a law which basically gives the government the right to reserved mineral lands for its own purposes. They claimed a number of areas as "reserved areas" for future mining, and thus the commercialization of the Benguet gold mining.

In the year 1914 in the south, Surigao and other parts of Caraga Region was declared as an "Iron Reserved" area for future mining. By then, the mining industry in the Philippines was on its way to boom and the Commonwealth US government took more hold of it forming a Mining Bureau to regulate all potential operations in the future.

In 1921, there was no large scale mining but many were making a living from small scale gold mining. By 1933 to 1941, gold mining popped up its cherry. It was the dominant mineral in the industry and was the most important.

A decade later, under the tyranny of the Japanese, Filipinos were coerced to mine for metals in many regions of the Philippines, to be used for war weapons in the Japanese sick conquest

to rule the world.

This paved way for a more commercialized, exploited and degenerated Philippines. In the 1950's copper mining was the most successful, and was the baby of Mining corporations. Large scale mining followed a few generations later reaching its peak in the 1960 and 1970's. By the late 80's, world demand for copper decreased because the world seemed to switch its interest on gold. However, a number of mining companies who mined for gold in that period closed because of law violations and so gold mining had a bit of denouement.

Under the WTO, IMF-WB, the neo-colonized Philippines was again coerced to adjust its economic policies to adhere to neo-liberal policies. By 1994, pro-development politicians such as Gloria Macapagal Arroyo among the rest, lobbied a Mining Bill which would later become the Republic Act 7942 or the Philippine Mining Act of 1995.

This law basically puts power over land, resources and life to Corporations and because of the Regalian doctrine- a law which basically gives the government the right to own and do whatever they wish in public lands, many areas became mining hotspots.

By 1996, the Philippine Mining Industry got back on track allowing offshore companies to operate fully in the reserved areas and so was disaster to a number of places in the Philippines. In March 1996, the Marcopper tunnel in Marinduque collapsed. In rough estimation, 1.6 million cubic meters of mine tailings flowed from the mine pit to the Makulapnit and Boac river trapping 4,400 people in 20 villages. That incident killed the Boac river not to mention the massive siltation of downstream communities and coastal areas. Among the number of tragedies that happened in 1998 are the Malangas Coal Corporation case in Zamboanga Del Sur, Mindanao where an explosion occurred in the mine site killing almost a hundred workers and injuring 35 people and by 2004, another disaster happened in Surigao Del Norte, Mindanao. That time, it was from one of the largest and longstanding mining corporations in the Philippines- the Manila Mining Corpor-



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ation(MMC). Three disastrous incidents occurred where approximately five million cubic meters of waste materials containing high levels of mercury damaging local people's agricultural lands and temporarily poisoned the adjacent Placer Bay.

The Matrix of the Philippine Mining Industry - Today

The mining industry is one of the biggest industries in the world to date. In every part of the world where there are minerals, mining companies such as Canada, United States, Australia, Asia, Japan and Norway and many parts of Europe compete to exploit the resources which they can gain profit from. Consequently, this has led to the horrendous destruction of the Earth's biosphere. Life support system such as water forests and wildlife are destroyed everyday to serve the mining companies profit motive.

In addition, local people's livelihood system are eradicated in the process. Farmers, fisher folks, and indigenous/ tribal people's end up being harassed, bribed with money and other tactical incentives, displaced and inevitably, some people, get killed if they militantly oppose a mining operation in their region.

Mining is a vital industry of the techno-industrial society. Through centuries, people from different corners of the globe mined for different kind of minerals which they can use in daily lives. However, the advent of neo-liberalism or capitalism has made the industry more powerful and tyrannical. In just a few hundred years, the mining industry has put tragedy to various corners of the globe. They have destroyed the planet's biosphere including wildlife, farmers, fishermen, indigenous people and had made the last remaining forests, rivers and oceans of the world, which have existed for millions of years, disappear.

More than 100 upland tribal groups excluding fisher folks and farmers in the Philippines were radically affected by destructive logging and mining operations from 1960-1980. Despite the resistance and support from outside groups, tribal people, farmers and fisher folks are most likely to leave their land, culture and resources; and forced to adapt a new way of life(industrialized) and get displaced in the slums of cities.

At the present, there are more than 20 Major Large Scale mining operations, 10 Medium Scale Nickel Mines, more than

50 pending mining applications and more than 2000 Non-metallic small scale mining operations all throughout the Archipelago with unique historical backgrounds, mineral resources, ecological habitat and economic conditions.

In a nutshell, mining company bullies, mostly coming from Canada, Australia, Japan, Asia and Europe are doing the following to people and nature:

- ✍ Manipulate Philippine Government laws (through pro-development politicians) to pursue mining operations. Bribing local and national politicians including the police and military forces to support their campaigns.
- ✍ Disrespect local people's parameters on their land and resources.
- ✍ Displace indigenous/tribal communities, force them to leave their land and resources.
- ✍ Bribing local people with money and resources and promise them a better life condition by offering "jobs".
- ✍ Threaten a watershed stability of a given mining target area.
- ✍ Destroy farmlands and sea resources.
- ✍ Destroy forest ecosystems of a given area.

Our Solution: Eco-Defense Project: Community Solidarity, Cyberactivism, and Media Advocacy

The project aims to reach out and support mining affected communities all over the Philippines through documentation, cyberactivism and Media Advocacy.

Undangon Ang Mina (Translated in Filipino-Visayan as "Stop Mining") Network is a small group of people in a number of places in the Philippines working on Anti-Corporate operations. The group aims to reach out to a number of communities of resistance all over the Philippine archipelago- build solidarity ties, and support them in their battle against corporate domination by setting up the following:

An independent fact finding group to document the damages brought by corporations in different areas in the Philippines.

✍ An active grassroots networking group (local and international) to stimulate local and international mobilization.

✍ An independent media group that will document human rights abuses and environmental damage brought mostly by Canadian, Australian, American (US), Asian and European Mining Companies operating in the Philippines.

The destruction of rain forests, jeopardy on watershed security, disregardment of people's rights to self-determination,

autonomy and self-sufficiency, corrupt political system(Philippine context), displacement of indigenous communities, fisher folks and farming societies, and the coercion to fit in with the corporate culture definitely needs have its end. People all over the archipelago are organizing themselves and working with outside groups to resist corporate tyranny and bring justice. However, throughout the years, the approach of working together with communities has been dominated by Leftist groups and is most hierarchical in many terms. It has been the same traditional pattern, NGO's and missionary aid enter a community, bring in new ideas, give support (depending on what "specialty" the NGO might have) and try to let people follow the leftist brand of socio-political and economic solution.

Furthermore, the Philippine political spectrum is predominantly composed of two blocks (Akbayan and BAYAN MUNA- both are communists) with hundred of umbrella organizations and people's movement. All throughout the country, these groups had been working on anti-mining issues apart from the many, and have been the partner of most communities against mining. The dilemma however is, people are left with little or no decision making power as these groups are most likely to mediate and in many occasions dictate what needs to be done.

In response to the bureaucratic, hierarchical approach to solidarity resistance of anti-mining communities in the Philippines, ecological havoc and cultural demolition, the network aims to take action by:

Connect to communities of resistance (local and international)

✍ Inform local groups where head offices of companies are located f.e Philex Gold Corporation- Vancouver, Canada and set up an international pressure and boycott campaign.

✍ Document their issue (text, audio and video documentary) - Human rights abuses and environmental devastation and inform the local and global community.

✍ Bring in an anti-authoritarian approach to integration and relationship and working with communities- support the locals with what they think and feel, is the best solution for the mining situation in their area.

✍ Learning and exchanges from different community situations and struggles.

Further Information:

<http://undangonangmina.alphabetthreat.co.uk>
<http://kinaiyahanunahon.alphabetthreat.co.uk>