

# The Matrix of the Philippine Mining Industry

“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-



Industrieller Goldabbau in Philippinien