

# JustComment

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## 'No to mining, Yes to life' ... *Palayasin* 'Go away'

**As mining companies engage** in human rights abuses, land grabs, environmental destruction, community upheaval, loss of traditional life, militarisation, pollution of vital ecosystems, and vilification and killing of human rights defenders and activists, in the Philippines the Tagalog word '*palayasin*' (go away) rings out...and is heard throughout Asia, Latin America, Europe, Oceania and Africa. Though companies claim they are responsible corporate citizens, the branding does not match the reality. Ecosystems and farmlands can never be restored to their original state.

Amidst much suffering to indigenous communities and local people, mining corporations, in amassing much wealth, wield economic and political power over governments, whilst being protected by international trade and financial institutions. But voices, cry out, 'go away', '**no to mining, yes to life!**'

In November 2014, civil society groups, social movements and indigenous people from Colombia, Uganda, the Philippines, Spain, Scotland, South Africa sent this clear message: 'no to mining and yes to life' and the need for solidarity in their struggle.

At the 2015 **International Peoples' Conference on Mining**, Manila, Philippines, we saw<sup>2</sup> how the Philippines is a microcosm of how globalisation or neoliberal policies on mining lead to massive land grabbing, depletion of natural resources, environmental devastation, displacement of communities, intensified militarisation and human rights violations. Mining penetrates all parts of the planet with devastating

results – threatening the integrity of ecosystems on our already fragile Earth, as well as agriculture, food production, soil fertility, fresh water systems, the air, and climate.

**Yes healthy ecosystems, Yes healthy food! Yes water! Yes life!**

The extraction of minerals pollutes areas beyond the actual mining sites for years after closing operation. Stella Matutina, a Filipino Benedictine sister working with the Lumad (indigenous) people of Mindanao, says: 'they take our wealth and leave us the rubbish'. Pope Francis referred to the 'mess' in our planet in his recent Encyclical **Laudato Si'**. Governments promote mining and provide incentives to corporations in the name of 'the national interest' and 'economic growth'<sup>3</sup>, whilst the harm and cost to ordinary peoples' lives, communities and future generations of all species is barely recognised. **For governments it is 'yes to mining, and no to life' for their people.**

### Food

Despite popular belief, small farmers actually feed the world. But, their land, water, livelihoods and capacity to produce food are undermined for the extraction of minerals, metals and fossil fuels.<sup>4</sup>

### Soil, Water and Air Pollution

In the villages near Africa's biggest copper mine, one can smell and taste the pollution. Excessive quantities of water are needed for all types of mining. Depletion of local water sources jeopardise a community's ability produce food and affects fish and wildlife



populations, and thus community livelihoods and food security.<sup>5</sup>

### Land Grabbing and the Impact on Women

The thirst for increased profit leads to land grabs and the search for cheap and docile labour – and causes violence. This affects women disproportionately because they are responsible for household nutrition as mining activity denies them access to their land, water and food crops. They are also vulnerable to abuse from activities associated with mining, e.g., road building, transportation and traders. Because of mining, family nutrition suffers because of escalating prices for staple foods.' Nearly half the Bangladeshi population is food insecure, and nearly one quarter is severely food insecure. Local production should be strengthened, not sacrificed for industrial projects.<sup>6</sup> Vast open pits replace land from farming communities.

Countries in Asia, such as the Philippines, or Africa and Latin America, that are resource-rich but economically

poor have the same story: large-scale mining projects spoil the environment, plunder natural resources and cause untold human suffering.<sup>7</sup>

### **Livelihoods Lost vs. Job Creation**

Though mining offers employment for a defined period, the impact on the landscape and community livelihoods lasts for centuries. In Romania, where 900 jobs would be created, the use of cyanide destroyed 20,000 jobs in agriculture, tourism and other services. In South Africa, coal production in one province led to the loss of livelihood for 11,000 people.<sup>8</sup>

### **Government Involvement**

It is governments that allow mining operations to continue despite numerous deaths through mine accidents. Turkish lawyers use 'massacre' to describe mining deaths but they are not accidents. They are foreseen as companies take out insurance to protect themselves. Despite numerous 'accidents' and other legal and environmental violations, companies are allowed to continue operations. South Africa saw similar violations as well as the killing of 34 and injuring of 78 others when fired upon in 2012 by security forces. In Papua New Guinea, between 1984-2013m Australia's BHP Billiton's open-pit Ok Tedi Mine caused massive environmental degradation and pollution of rivers and adjacent ecosystems after discharging two billion tons of mine waste into the river. In West Papua, mining giants Rio Tinto and Freeport-McMoran have reportedly poured \$35 million into military infrastructure and vehicles and paid at least \$20 million to state security forces from 1998 to 2004 to quell opposition against its Grasberg Mine. Opposition to the mining operations of Freeport Macmoran, human rights violations and environmental destruction in one of the planet's most biodiverse places has continued for decades in this

most militarised area in Indonesia. Resistance to the land grabbing and plunder of Freeport Macmoran is interlinked with the struggle for national liberation. In China, coal miners seem most exploited. In 2013, there were 589 accidents and 1,049 deaths in its coal mining industry and 3,357 workers were killed in 2011-2012.

### **Neoliberalisation of the mining industry**

In the 1990s, over 80 countries changed their mining regimes after lobbying by mining corporations and the dictates of international financial institutions (IFIs). Capital controls and regulations were lifted; generous tax breaks, granted; and legislation to quell local opposition to mining activities, implemented. The needs of each country gave way to the dictates of the international market and made it hostage to the changes of international trading. This liberalisation of the mining industry in the Philippines has led to economic deterioration. Instead of growth for the people, extraction of resources for export has resulted in environmental devastation and increased poverty and inequality. 82 environmental activists were victims of extrajudicial killings from 2001-2015,

### **Crisis**

The global mining industry has recently faced an oversupply of mineral products, falling prices and profit decreases<sup>9</sup>. To reduce production costs and increased profits companies have demanded lower taxes and government royalty shares, more lax environmental laws and reduced wages, greater job insecurity and lower work safety standards for workers. They have even delayed projects or shut down mines to manipulate supply and increase prices.

### **People's resistance and the anti-mining movement**

Resistance to mining has taken the form of struggling for workers' rights,

environmental protection, right to the land for indigenous people, assertion of the rights and welfare of mining communities and human rights in general. People's movements for economic sovereignty, food security and development justice continually face up to the plunderers, despoilers and their powerful protectors on the international, national and local level.

Despite increasing exploitation and more repressive action of the global mining industry, people's resistance continues to gather strength particularly among indigenous peoples and among the peasantry and other rural poor communities.<sup>10</sup>

In the Philippines, due to the strong resistance of affected communities to protect their lands and the surrounding environment, the 4th biggest global mining company has begun to withdraw from a long-delayed \$5.6 billion gold mining project. In El Salvador, the government stopped granting gold mining permits since 2008 to preserve its water resources. The Australian-Canadian owned mining company OceanaGold-Pacific Rim had its mining permit revoked. In 2009, it filed a lawsuit against the Salvadoran government seeking US\$301 million in damages. The government and people continue to stand firm against gold mining in their country. This case in El Salvador provides a preview as to what can be expected if controversial trade deals like the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) and Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) are passed

There are so many more heroic struggles of indigenous peoples, peasants, mine workers, environmentalists, human rights advocates and church people in Africa, America, Asia and Europe. Their message is the same: mining companies cannot continue to plunder the common resources. 'Palayasin'..:Go away'..'YES to LIFE'.

*Full set of resources and references are on the ERC website [www.erc.org.au](http://www.erc.org.au)*



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