
Philippines: Attempts to undermine local resistance to mining

The Palawan Province has the best-conserved and most ecologically diverse forest in the Philippines inhabited by vulnerable indigenous communities, some of them living in partial isolation.

But the region is being threatened by mining companies such as MacroAsia, Ipilan Nickel Mining Corporation and LEBACH which have entered protected zones and indigenous land to excavate test-pits and make deep drilling-holes in search for nickel. Also Rio Tuba Nickel Mining Corporation (RTNMC) has built roads undermining the integrity of the Bulanjao range, one of the most precious biodiversity hotspots in southern Palawan. Citinickel, Berong Nickel and other mining companies partnering with the Canadian MBMI group also pose a threat to Palawan forest (see WRM Bulletin N° 165).

The resistance of Palawan communities against mining corporations has been continuous; more than one year ago ALDAW Network (Ancestral Land/Domain Watch) launched the Stop Mining Palawan Forest Petition to The President of the Republic of the Philippines (<http://www.petitiononline.com/PA2010/petition.html>) with a special concern towards indigenous peoples (and also calling for a stop of oil palm development in Palawan). The Save Palawan Movement has more recently launched the No to Mining in Palawan petition (<http://no2mininginpalawan.com/>) in search of 10 million signatures to stop mining in Palawan. Support is now being called for both petitions.

A recent move by MacroAsia Corporation shows how big mining corporations try to manipulate opposition. They have power and money and they try to use those weapons to “divide and rule”, so to undermine people’s social cohesion, solidarity networks and, ultimately communities’ ability to fight mining interests in a concerted and well-coordinated effort.

The Indigenous Peoples network ALDAW (Ancestral Land/Domain Watch) has denounced that 30 “fake” tribal leaders, so-called Tribal Chieftains, have been paid by the mining company MacroAsia Mining Corporation (MAC) and appointed by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) in order to show support for MAC, despite opposite views from the majority of the Indigenous Peoples to be directly impacted by mining.

ALDAW denounces that by creating ‘ad-hoc’ “tribal leaders” NCIP and MacroAsia have bluntly disregarded local decision-making processes that are customarily facilitated by elders and traditional leaders, which are recognized and respected by their respective communities. Recently, ALDAW has facilitated the organization of a mission composed by genuine Palawan indigenous representatives who have travelled to Manila for bringing their voices and grievances to the attention of NCIP and, thus, to counterbalance the ‘fabricated’ testimonies of the ‘fake’ tribal chieftains. (See recent press releases at <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/12798/palawan-tribal-folk-hit-use-of-fake-leaders>, <http://lopezlink.ph/csr/1920-indigenous-people-say-no-mining-in-brookes-point-palawan>, and <http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleId=694390&publicationSubCategoryId=63>) As of now, the Palawan delegation’s negotiations with the newly elected NCIP chairman (Zenaida

Brigida Hamada-Pawid) and other government representatives have been successful. This has led to new hopes such as NCIP final decision of not endorsing the so called 'certificates of preconditions' to those mining companies encroaching on the indigenous ancestral lands.

Article based on information provided by ALDAW and their press release "Indigenous Palawan Leaders Soon To Confront The National Commission On Indigenous Peoples (Ncip) In Manila", e-mail aldaw.indigenousnetwork@gmail.com