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## [Philippines: A call to stop mining in Palawan](#)

SAY NO to mining in Palawan Province, the home of the best-conserved and most ecologically diverse forest in the Philippines. Sign the on-line signature petition to deliver a strong message to the Philippine and Palawan governments demanding for an immediate stop of ongoing and pending mining activities in Palawan and for the non-endorsement of new mining applications. Here is the link to the petition launched by the Save Palawan Movement: <http://www.intellithink.com.ph/wordpress/>

Palawan is home to three main ethnic groups: The Palawan, the Tagbanua and the Batak. The southern part of the main island, where most mining activities are concentrated, is also inhabited by vulnerable indigenous communities living in partial isolation (see video: <http://tinyurl.com/4x4lrc6>). Their livelihood is based on 'swidden' [rotational] cultivation, hunting and gathering, and commercial collection of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs).

Today the areas being threatened by mining activities also include indigenous burial grounds, sacred and worship sites. The local inhabitants perceive the destruction of these historical and natural landmarks as an obliteration of their history and collective memories of the past.

Until now Palawan indigenous communities are the traditional custodians of a unique biodiversity, which also includes 49 animals and 56 plant species, which are globally threatened with extinction, according to IUCN (The International Union for the Conservation of Nature).

Open-pit and strip mining for nickel results in the flattening of mountain tops, in the plundering of precious forest, in the production of vast amounts of tailings that contaminate fresh water sources and the sea.

In less than one decade, mining could obliterate a highly diverse landscape, which is the only source of livelihood and cultural sustenance for hundreds of indigenous and rural communities. (see video: <http://tinyurl.com/4227xbg>).

In 1990, because of its rich biocultural diversity, Palawan was declared by the UNESCO as a 'Man and Biosphere Reserve'. In spite of this, the Philippine Government is favoring the intensification of mineral exploitation on the island, thus jeopardizing the livelihood of both indigenous communities and farmers. As of now, the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) - the provincial government body in charge of ensuring the sustainable development of the island - has failed to fulfill its mandate and has already released environmental clearances (EC) to mining corporations (see <http://tinyurl.com/3nlpdab>).

Mining companies such as MacroAsia, Ipilan Nickel Mining Corporation and LEBACH have entered protected zones and indigenous cultivated land where they have already excavated test-pits and made deep drilling-holes. This is particularly prevalent within the uplands of Brooke's Point Municipality (see 'geotagg' report: <http://tinyurl.com/3vend4z>). Overall, joint 'geotagged reports' by ALDAW and the Center for Biocultural Diversity (CBCD) of the University of Kent, clearly show that exploration activities have been allowed in "Core" and "Restricted" zones despite all rules and

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regulations engraved into the Strategic Environmental Plan (SEP), also known as Republic Act 7611.

The SEP Programme was highly funded by the European Union, which has also invested 17 million Euros in the 7-year special project known as the Palawan Tropical Forestry Protection Programme (PTFPP). However, many of the alleged project beneficiaries still complain that most of the money was used to pay disproportionately high salaries to foreign consultants, project directors/managers and government officials and that, ultimately, the project has left behind little tangible evidence of its success.

Sadly, the European Union remains another silent witness of the Palawan tragedy.

Further south, Rio Tuba Nickel Mining Corporation (RTNMC) has already built roads across the Bulanjao mountain range, thus undermining the integrity of one of the most precious biodiversity hotspot in southern Palawan (see video at <http://tinyurl.com/4yjr47c>, and 'geotagged' report: <http://tinyurl.com/4ye2fgm>)

Corporations such as Citinickel, Berong Nickel and other mining companies partnering with the Canadian MBMI group represent an additional threat to Palawan forest (see: <http://tinyurl.com/2f7zwvr>)

The political squabbles underlying the mining saga on Palawan Island are also detected in the ambiguous behavior of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) – the official government body in charge of protecting the rights of tribal communities. The NCIP Palawan Provincial Office has bluntly violated all required procedures leading to transparent and genuine Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) processes, siding instead with the mining companies.

After intense pressure from human rights and environmental groups such as the Rainforest Rescue, the UNESCO has finally made an attempt in looking into the Palawan case. On 18 February 2011, UNESCO Director General (DG), Irina Bokova, has forwarded a letter of concern on the mining threats in Palawan to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Chairman of the National Commission of the Philippines for UNESCO. The letter is requesting the said institution to provide a comprehensive report to UNESCO on the mining situation in the Palawan Biosphere Reserve, and additional information on the current and future mining activities on the core zones of the biosphere reserve.

Recently, on 25 March, UNESCO DG also visited the Philippines, meeting with President Benigno Aquino and commending him for "his strong commitment to education and sustainable development" (see: <http://tinyurl.com/3b4cmvn>). Indeed, this is quite ironical since the newly appointed Philippine President is replicating the mining aggression policy of his predecessor, and – until now – his commitment to environmental and human rights issues has been rather weak. President Aquino explained to UNESCO DG that a total ban on mining would be counterproductive, as it would open the way to small, unregulated mining. The argument, according to which, commercial 'regulated' mining will avoid the proliferation of 'unregulated' mining is a non-sense, also in view of the fact that, in Palawan, there is already a 25-year moratorium on small-scale mining, passed by the Provincial Board on November 2008. However, this moratorium is not enough to prevent large-scale mining corporations from plundering the Island.

Recently, the struggle to Save Palawan has reached momentum after the ominous murder of environmental campaigner and radio journalist Gerry Ortega on 24th January (see <http://tinyurl.com/4s4lf9r>). Together with ALDAW and other members of the Save Palawan Movement, Alyansa Tigil Mina (ATM), the largest anti-mining advocacy network in the Philippines

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(<http://www.alyansatigilmina.net/>) is playing a major role in bringing the Palawan case to national and international attention.

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