

BRIEF

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE CANADA

Vancouver, B.C. June 14, 2006

The British Columbia Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines (BCCHRP) welcomes the opportunity to engage in this public discussion of the corporate social responsibility of Canadian mining companies. But we deplore the absence of representatives of the people of the South in tomorrow's closed-door meetings. We have looked at mining cases in the Philippines and can say that there are many problems associated with exploration and mining practices of companies with offices in Canada or registration on stock markets in Canada.

We have many serious concerns. In the past few years many communities and groups in the Philippines have appealed to us to advocate for them about issues around Canadian mining companies, from Zamboanga del Norte in Mindanao, to the provinces of Marinduque and Mindoro in the Southern Tagalog region.

BCCHRP supports the call for a new approach to corporate social responsibility on the part of the Canadian government. There is indeed a great need for legislation to hold Canadian companies responsible for their actions overseas. We also support the call for policies that require compliance with international human rights and environmental standards, including labour standards.

BCCHRP is a solidarity group formed by Canadians from church and labour groups in 1982 at the height of the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines. Following the fall of Marcos and the ascension of Corazon Aquino Canada made the Philippines a priority on its development assistance (CIDA) list.

Democracy and human rights remain the preoccupations of BCCHRP today in the light of the current situation under President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Since she took power in 2001, her government is being blamed for an unprecedented rise in extra-judicial killings. The human rights alliance Karapatan has reported more than 600 people have been killed including human rights workers, church people, trade unionists and journalists so much so that the Philippines is now considered the second most dangerous country for journalists next to Iraq. Civil liberties have been suspended and a number of parliamentarians are illegally detained.

BCCHRP would like the Canadian government to pay more attention to this deteriorating situation in the Philippines given that Canada's development aid is tied to the promotion of good governance and the promotion of democracy. Certainly, the current situation in the Philippines puts into doubt these assumptions.

It is in this environment of state repression and undemocratic governance, that the Canadian government should be especially vigilant about the activities of Canada-based companies. The circumstances have given rise to intensified militarization of mining activities that produce more violent incidents in which many deaths, injuries, displacements and detentions have occurred. Since we cannot always count on foreign governments to act responsibly and monitor and control the actions of industry within their borders, and since the globalization of industry implicates more parties and distributes social, environment and financial responsibility globally, the Canadian government should make efforts to regulate its industries abroad.

BCCHRP first took up mining issues upon the collapse of the copper mine in Marinduque Province that was originally owned by Placer Dome. That mine was forced to close in 1996. Despite independent fact finding missions and health and environmental assessments, several public reports and journal articles, the original owners have not carried out their full responsibility to clean up the island nor support indemnification and rehabilitation of the affected communities, nor pay out compensation to injured parties. Investigations revealed Placer Dome routinely dumped tailings directly into ocean and fresh waters, and criminally negligent in constructing dirt dams that fell vulnerable to occasional typhoons. Thus, the past and current owners have the further responsibility to rectify widespread damage incurred over at least 15 years before the 1996 accident.

Toronto Ventures Incorporated (TVI), another Canadian company, is also involved in the Subanen tribal area in Zamboanga del Norte, Mindanao Province. This project is opposed by the Subanens and in fact was one of the case studies examined by the parliamentary, DFAIT Standing Committee hearing. BCCHRP has fully supported the Subanen people in their fight against TVI.

The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines have also called for the banning of large scale mining in the country while the Philippine government aggressively campaigns to open the country to foreign mining as a means of raising much needed cash to help its moribund economy. Our investigations into mining inform us that communities are not benefiting economically or socially from local mining regardless. It appears that more revenue has been taken away from small-scale mining with the incursions of large-scale mining activities. Such is the situation with respect to TVI, for example. We note that the Canadian ambassador Peter Sutherland questioned the Philippine government on its mining policy following the bishops' call for a moratorium. We fully support the bishops' call for a moratorium on large-scale mining. We call on the Canadian government to respect the wishes of the people of the Philippines.

Our study of mining shows that such hazards and bad practices are typical of the mining industry worldwide. We have attended meetings where company spokespersons and consultants present a positive picture of an aggressive industry with a polite face and good heart. But best practices are rarely practiced and insufficient regardless, in our opinion. Thousands of peasants, fisher folk and tribal peoples in communities in the Philippines are being hurt, as multitudes are affected in many poor countries from Guatemala to Kenya. The natural resources are being ravaged in unproductive ways. People's health and the physical environment are deteriorating from mining.

The time to step back and make some changes is past due. Substantive changes with the full participation of affected communities must be made as of today. Companies must be held accountable for past damages they have had a part in incurring. BCCHRP fully supports the lobby for legislation to regulate mining companies activities abroad. We further support whole-heartedly the call for policies to condition the Canadian government's financing of mining companies and projects. We are confident that concrete means of implementing corporate social (and environmental) responsibility can be found.

BCCHRP echoes the concerns expressed by other organizations on the hindrances to participation in this roundtable especially those from the South most affected Canadian mining companies.

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