

Mining destroys life, Philippine Bishops say it must stop

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There is one glaring piece of evidence that convinces me that large scale mining in the Philippines befits mostly the rich and destroys the environment is one great gigantic hole in the ground in Pili, San Marcelino, Zambales. The rumbling trucks and great jaws of the earth eating machines in the Benguet-Dizon mine are now gone. Silence reigns.

A once proud and mighty mountain, it's valuable chromate and gold extracted, milled and trucked to the coast and shipped to Japan is no more. The Benguet-Dizon open pit mine is exhausted and dead. The forest has been long cut down, the surrounding hills bare and brown, the soil has been washed away and a vast open pit, like an ugly wound scars the earth. Then came the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo and there was nothing to hold back the landslides and floods. A lake of poisoned water and chemicals behind a leaky dam threatens disastrous consequences.

The looters have the profits safely banked abroad and the people are just as poor as they were before despite all the promises of prosperity and stability.

Now an avalanche of poisonous propaganda has been unleashed against the Bishops and the defenders of people rights and to the environmentalists. It paints them as anti-people, anti-progress and creators of poverty and unemployment for their stand against the irresponsible mining and logging practices of the ruling elite.

The mining propagandists have forgotten the disasters of the recent pass and those of the present? Benguet mines in Baguio, Marandaque mines in Mindanao? The most recent disaster at Rapu-Rapu, in Alba province. This is the scene of two cyanide mining spills by Lafayette Phils Mining operations. Likewise with the others environmental degradation and destruction was caused by spills of toxic fluids.

The mining moguls say the bishop's call to repeal the mining act is sweeping and extreme. Mining according to these propagandists is the hope of the nation, the end of poverty, and the wiping out of the national debt. The bishops say it must be repealed. They have a valid reason. Environmental protections law are circumvented and sometimes ignored. Violations are rampant. In the village of new San Juan, Cabangan, Zambales, bulldozers are roaring and ripping yet again to get at deposits of chromate on the ancestral land of the Aeta without permits according to the NGO investigators.

Laws are only as good as the people charged to uphold and implement them. A corruption riddled government plagued by one scandal after another cannot be trusted to protect the rights of the poor.

Mining practices past and present show that the money earned from mining the natural heritage, flows, not to the poor but to the rich. The Philippine elite, in cahoots with foreign tycoons take it all. After years of oil, gas and mineral extraction, the country is poorer than ever.

In this nation of 86 million a 2% speck of the population are the wealthy dynastic families and they own or control 70% of the national wealth. The rest are a sliver of middle class and a mass of

impoverished peasants and slum dwellers. So desperate are they to escape the bitterness of this unjust and impoverished society they swarmed in their thousands outside a Manila television show last week for a chance to win a prize and more than 70 died in the crush and more injured.

Mining does not even offer a prize to the poor. Under the present oligarchy, it's not going to change the grossly unjust distribution of political power and economic wealth. They, who don't care don't share. If this is what the Bishops are deploring, they are right this greed is what must change. [End]

P.S.

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