NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Philippines mining: breaking ground and community

N.J. Viehland | May. 3, 2012 NCR Today

MANILA, Philippines -- Mining has divided people of Mindanao, the southern Philippines main island, like no other issue has in recent times, says Redemptorist Br. Karl Gaspar.

The sociologist/anthropologist expressed concern about the heavy consequences the mining imposes on indigenous cultural communities, saying education is key to the communities' protection.

Gaspar posted Thursday on his Facebook account [1] his reflections on tension among indigenous people and other communities affected by mining in Mindanao. The tensions escalated over the last week of April as President Benigno Aquino III's administration worked to finalize its mining policy.

Aquino told guests [2] at an April 17 book launch that his government has drafted an executive order on a mining policy and that he is awaiting feedback from stakeholders on issues of ecology, role of mining companies and local communities.

Beginning April 22, Earth Day, opponents of large-scale mining staged protests and campaigns around the country and online [3].

April 25-26, Marbel diocese's Social Action Center and a forum of church-related organizations supported by MISEREOR, the German Catholic Bishops' Organisation for Development Cooperation, conducted a fact-finding mission [4] to areas around Tampakan, where Sagittarius Mines Incorporated (SMI) is allegedly continuing its gold and copper mining project without the required Environmental Compliance Certificate from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. The provincial government of South Cotabato, where Tampakan is located, has banned open-pit mines, which SMI's project would use.

That mission's report, issued Saturday, said SMI's mining project [5] has divided the indigenous B'laan people. The report recommended the government pull out seven military detachments in the communities; enforce a definite moratorium on all SMI activities in the area; recognize and respect the customary laws of the B'laan on conflict resolution; provide proper free prior information to people affected by mining operations; and ensure transparency and accountability of tribal chieftains, SMI and local government unit in dealing with communities.

The military says troops are needed [6] to protect communities from communist rebel attacks against mining companies.

Tampakan Forum conducted the mission after B'laan leaders, mostly from the Davao del Sur side of the mountain, reported military presence in the area, alleged harassment of residents and reported hoisting of streamers announcing relocation of families to make way for the SMI project, Fr. Joy Pelino, Marbel social action director, told *NCR*.

"B'laan approached the church, so we formed a mission that included Bishop (Guillermo) Afable of Digos [7],"

Pelino said.

On May 1, however, members of the Sangguniang Bayan municipal legislative body endorsed SMI's Tampakan copper-gold project, reported MindaNews [8], citing Vice Mayor Relly Leysa's report that six councilors voted to endorse the project, four opposed and one abstained

Gaspar said the move shows how the mining issue is pitting government units, church leaders and groups, workers and citizens against its own sectors.

North of Marbel on Saturday, 5,000 people reportedly rallied against mining operations [9] for nickel and other minerals in Surigao del Sur while entertainers performed at a simultaneous pro-mining rally some kilometers away. Workers of three mining companies operating in the diocese at the latter rally expressed gratitude for improvement in the community and family lives brought by the mining industry.
t
Columnist Emil Jurado in his May 2 column [10] claimed anti-mining activists are preventing responsible mining from alleviating poverty and unemployment. Jurado criticized the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines for inaction on a mining company's complaints about innuendos and biased reporting on the killing of an anti-mining advocate in 2010.

He questioned Fr. Edwin Gariguez's recent Goldman Environmental Prize [11], saying all the priest did was "demonize a well-respected and professionally managed multinational mining company" and "feed locals with false information about the supposed dangers of mining."

Gariguez, before accepting his Goldman Prize, had told *NCR* those who claim to practice responsible mining in the country "pay only lip service and mean only that they will plant trees, build roads and schools." He said responsible mining means "you cannot mine in watershed areas, areas where indigenous communities live, in areas where there's conflict or are threatened by natural phenomena, like earthquake-prone areas."

"Unfair" sharing of profits and problems brought on by the industry is another area of concern. Aquino at the book launch added his voice to this debate. Former Bishops'-Businessmen's Conference for Human Development cluster chairman Christian Monsod has explained [12] why mining in the Philippines is a social justice issue.

Aquino government's impending policy statement on mining is fueling hope in Manila Auxiliary Bishop Broderick Pabillo for change of the Mining Act of 1995 [13], "which is very defective," the chairman of Catholic bishops' Commission on Social Action, Justice and Peace told *NCR*.

"Hopefully, the (executive order) can be a direction toward a new environment for mining that will end up with a new law that is more pro-environment and pro-people rather than pro-investment," Pabillo said. The law allows 100 percent foreign exploitation of the country's mineral and non-mineral wealth.

Pabillo adds, "As of now, there cannot be responsible mining with the kind of law and the kind of government that we have," explaining that "people can easily be bought." He said when there's a change of law and also a government that is even more sincere in protecting the people, "maybe we can have responsible mining at that time."

Other opponents of large-scale mining frown on a presidential order [14], saying it can perpetuate irresponsible mining practices by preserving current mining laws.

"That will really depend on how strong we lobby for change of the law," Pabillo said. "On his own, Aquino will not (move to change the law). But if there is a strong lobby from the ground, he may be forced politically to do

that."

Much is at stake in the mining industry. The Tampakan site alone is estimated to contain at least 15 million metric tons of copper deposit and 17.9 million ounces of gold deposit.

Speakers at a forum [15] organized by people in the mining industry said the deposits can be mined responsibly and made to serve the needs of society.

Last year, mining industry performance helped push the Philippine stock market to among Asia's best-performing, the Philippine Stock Exchange reported [16].

"But what large-scale mining companies do is they get our resources and send them abroad to be processed. When we have our own industries to process mines, then there can be gain in mining," Pabillo told *NCR*.

Until then, church groups propose a moratorium [17] on large-scale mining activities.

Source URL (retrieved on *06/18/2013 - 21:59*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/philippines-mining-breaking-ground-and-community

Links:
[1] https://www.facebook.com/karl.gaspar/posts/10150859181581970
[2] http://www.financemanila.net/forum/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=623&start=1924
[3] https://www.facebook.com/no2mininginpalawan
[4] http://www.sisterraquel.com/2012/04/eastwind-journals-33-press-statement-tampakan-forum-fact-finding-mission/
[5] http://www.smi.com.ph/EN/Pages/Home.aspx
[6] http://www.mindanews.com/top-stories/2011/10/14/military-secures-mine-sites-in-south-cotabato/
[7] http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/ddigo.html
[8] http://www.mindanews.com/top-stories/2012/05/01/municipal-board-ok-for-tampakan-project-stirs-controversy/
[9] http://www.interaksyon.com/article/30559/rallies-against-and-for-mining-held-in-surigao
[10] http://manilastandardtoday.com/2012/05/02/protect-responsible-mining/
[11] http://ncronline.org/news/ecology/filipino-priest-wins-environmental-award-work-against-nickel-mine
[12] http://no2mininginpalawan.com/2011/12/25/the-mining-industry-issues-arguments-and-facts-christian-s-monsod/
[13] ttp://www.chanrobles.com/RA7942.htm
[14] http://bulatlat.com/main/2012/03/09/%E2%80%98philippine-mining-act-cannot-be-saved-by-an-executive-order%E2%80%99-%E2%80%93-environmentalists/
[15] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XtdI6_0g9j0&feature=relmfu
[16] http://business.inquirer.net/48913/pse-backs-%E2%80%98responsible-mining%E2%80%99-framework
[17] http://www.mindanews.com/top-stories/2012/01/27/more-calls-for-mining-moratorium-aired-amid-%E2%80%9Cthe-most-dangerous-mines-in-the-world%E2%80%9D/