

IN ITS bid to lure top foreign investors to the country's mining industry, the Arroyo government and the Chamber of Mines hosted the 7th Asia-Pacific Mining Conference on June 5-7 at the Makati Shangri-la Hotel.

This high profile event was also organized by the ASEAN Federation of Mining Associations (AFMA), whose current



THE ANTI-MINING ROAD SHOW

chair Benjamin Philip Romualdez¹ is also the president of the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines. AFMA members were also the main delegates to the conference.

On June 4-8, local anti-mining activists led by *Alyansa Tigil Mina*² (ATM, Alliance to Stop Mining) and *Defend Patrimony* (DP) staged protest activities during the holding of the regional mining summit to oppose the government's 'wholesale auction' of the country's sovereignty, environment and natural resources.

The protesters called for a moratorium on large-scale mining. In the experience of communities that have hosted mining operations, large-scale mining brought massive environmental degradation, health risks, human rights violations, and incursions into ancestral domains of indigenous Filipinos.

They were also demanding the repeal of the 1995 Philippine Mining Act because it violates constitutional provisions on patrimony. The Mining Act allows full foreign ownership of local mining ventures through the Financial or Technical Assistance Agreement

Protest Activities during the 7th Asia Pacific Mining Conference



Photos: ALYANSA TIGIL MINA

(FTAA) scheme.

The feast

The week began with a joint Alyansa Tigil Mina and Defend Patrimony press conference. The nation's two major anti-mining groups had always been allies in the campaign, but were now presenting a more unified program of action in light of the government's own aggressive

policy push.

The bishop of Caloocan City, Deogracias Iñiguez, presented the position of the Catholic Church on mining. The bishop has long championed the cause of environmentalism, having been the bishop of the diocese of Iba, covering Zambales province, which is the site of some hard-fought environmental and ancestral

rights battles.

Also in attendance was Vice Mayor Luis Castillet of Victoria town in Oriental Mindoro, who was elected to the position with the help of the Alyansa Labansa Mina (ALAMIN), ATM's local partner in the said province. ALAMIN utilized its grassroots power during the local elections in May to counter the support of mining company Crew Minerals to pro-mining candidates. Mindoro's anti-mining resistance is one of the strongest in the country and has delivered setback after setback to the operations of Crew Minerals Corporation, such that after more than a decade in Mindoro, Crew Minerals is still in the exploratory stage.

The highlight of the press conference was billed as "*pagpiyesta ng mga minero sa Pilipinas.*" It called attention to the government's pro-mining drive which covers all parts of the country, sparing not even the pristine wilds of Palawan. Volunteers wearing skull masks and hard hats pointed out on a map the mining areas being opened across the nation. The skull motif frequently appears in ATM events, because local communities see mining as a deadly enemy that will snuff out the life from their lands.

Greeting the AFMA delegates

On the morning of June 5, ATM and DP took positions at the Ayala Center grounds. ATM's main mass of streamers and flags were placed at the corner of the 6750 Building. DP and Bayan Muna were in their own positions near the Landmark, forcing the security forces of Shangri-La Makati to split their guards to contain the protesters.

Being the country's financial hub, Ayala District always has predictable schedule as business activities jump through its accustomed hoops day after day, but the rally disrupted that flow. Office workers got an eyeful of the anti-mining spectacle as ATM and DP hoisted high their banners and their black umbrellas spray



Masks and streamers: Anti-mining advocates during the 7th Asia Pacific Mining Conference (this and previous page). Photo: ALYANSA TIGIL MINA

painted with slogans.

Meant to be the major event of the anti-AFMA week, the rally could not have been timed better. With the elections over, and the counting of votes barely completed, the rally served as the first major mobilization since the May national and local polls. It drew an array of media people, including those sent to cover the AFMA opening at the Shangri-La hotel.

Bayan Muna's 'lightning rally' had dozens of activists rushing near the conference venue and staging a 'die-in' in the middle of the street, prompting a stampede of both riot police who attempted to stop them and reporters who ran to get a closer view of the action.

Rep. Risa Hontiveros-Baraquel (Akbayan Party-list) joined the mobilization and against a backdrop of black umbrellas, gave a solidarity speech.

Though generally peaceful, the rally forced traffic within the Ayala Center to slow down as security guards moved to seal off the area while leaving Shangri-La accessible to delegates.

More than 300 ATM and DP members and partners participated in the protest, with participants coming from as far as Zambales, Mindoro, Bicol, Cordillera and Romblon. Indigenous peoples' leaders and church groups from these

provinces also joined the rally.

On day 2 of the protests, student leaders from ATM's youth group partner, Kontra Mina, met with leaders from indigenous communities to hear firsthand accounts of human rights abuses perpetrated in mining sites. The two parties agreed to strengthen coordination and support mechanisms in the light of the intensifying struggle against large scale mining.

Human Rights and mining

Thursday, June 7, saw two major events taking place.

In the morning, the Legal Resource Center-Kasama sa Kalikasan (LRC-KSK) spearheaded the launching of the report "Human Rights Impact Assessments for Foreign Investment Projects: Learning from Community Experiences". The report, which was jointly produced with Amnesty International-Pilipinas and Rights & Democracy group, is the result of an investigation on the mining operations of Toronto Ventures, Inc. (TVI) in Mt. Canatuan, Siocon, Zamboanga del Norte, and on TVI's negative impact on the lives of the Subanons, the indigenous tribe living in the area.

As expected, TVI vehemently denied the report's findings and threatened to file civil action against its authors.

The launching was followed

The Tragedy in Siocon

Since 1997, when TVI, a Canadian mining company, acquired mining rights to 486 hectares in Mt. Canatuan in Siocon, residents of this small municipality have seen the degradation of their environment and the loss of their livelihood.

The Subanon tribe, which regards Mt. Canatuan as a sacred site, have been removed from their land and have been deprived of their source of livelihood.

Over the years, ATM had documented human rights violations perpetrated against the Subanons by TVI, through its private security forces. Several Subanon families had lost their homes, which were demolished by the mining company at night. Their peaceful mobilizations had been met with violent dispersals. Those who oppose the destruction of their sacred mountain had suffered various forms of intimidation and harassment.

The Subanons' right to self-determination was trampled on by TVI, when it manipulated local organizations to obtain consent for the mining operations. TVI's private security force - trained by the military - intimidates and imposes limitations on the Subanons' freedom of movement and restricts even their access to food and health services. As in other areas of the country, anti-mining residents are treated as 'annoyances' that should be silenced and subdued by military force.

The continuing struggle and suffering of the Subanons and other residents of Siocon have been spotlighted in recent days, when reports came out that the sulphide dam of TVI collapsed on July 11, 2007, following heavy rainfall. This is the second time the dam collapsed. The first reportedly happened in April 2 this year.

by a candle-lighting in front of the Manila Cathedral in Intramuros. Organized by another ATM partner, the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines - Justice, Peace and Integrity Commission (AMRSP-JPIC), the gathering was designed to draw in the religious sector in the campaign against large-scale mining. More than a hundred nuns and lay sisters and brothers from various parishes attended the vigil for the 'sanctity of creation'.

Week's end

On the last day of the week-long activity, ATM partners gave radio interviews. Bernardo Larin of the Philippine Human Rights Information Center (PhilRights) and Annabelle Plantilla of Haribon spoke on the human rights and environmental costs of large-scale mining in contrast to the investment and development being promised by the government and the private companies.

Meanwhile, Kontra Mina

again took to the streets of Makati, this time to picket the embassies of Canada and Australia. These two countries are home to a number of big mining firms operating in the Philippines. Leaflets were distributed and once more, volunteers in skull masks roamed the streets to drive home the point that for many people in the communities, mining is not an opportunity but a deadly threat to their way of life.

ENDNOTES

¹ Romualdez is the nephew of former First Lady Imelda Marcos.

² ATM is composed of NGOs, POs, church-based groups and academic institutions that have banded together "to challenge the aggressive promotion of large-scale mining in the Philippines." Both an advocacy group and a people's movement, ATM works to protect communities and natural resources threatened by large-scale mining.