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Halt mining in the Philippines says new report

By staff writers

A report launched today (Monday) in the UK will call for a moratorium on new mining in the Philippines.

Supported by UK Bishops and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, it will urge a review existing mining projects and a withdrawal of international investment in mining until 'proper procedures' are in place to protect human rights and the environment.

It will also bring pressure to bear on the Church of England concerning its own £80 million investments in two of the mining groups which the report challenges.

Entitled Philippines – Mining or Food, the report provides evidence that mining is causing large-scale ruin of island environments and people's livelihoods, in particular undermining food production and sustainability.

The report will be launched today in Westminster by former British Minister for International Development and Chair of the UK-based Working Group on Mining in the Philippines, Clare Short MP.

Alongside her will be Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, an Igorot indigenous woman from the Cordillera Region of Northern Philippines, and Chairperson of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, as well as Catholic Bishop John Arnold, Auxiliary Bishop in the Catholic Diocese of Westminster and Bishop Michael Doe, General Secretary of USPG: Anglicans in World Mission.

The report's authors, Robert Goodland a former environmental advisor to the World Bank, and Clive Wicks, visited the Philippines in February 2008 and documented six actual and proposed mining locations on the islands of Mindoro and Mindanao.

They warn that the large-scale mining proposed for the Philippines threatens to wreak havoc, compounding a legacy of deforestation and habitat destruction.

The report provides evidence to show that the extraction process damages food production, particularly rice, and imperils fisheries. The Philippines already relies on rice imports because of the decline in its domestic production. The authors join Filipino campaigners and the country's Catholic Bishops in calling for the Mining Act of 1995, which opened the country up to foreign mining companies, to be revoked.

Companies whose plans for mining are being challenged include Xstrata Copper, BHP Billiton, TVI Pacific, Philex Gold, and Intex Resources.

The Church of England has a £33.2 million shareholding in Xstrata group, of which Xstrata Copper is a part, and a £47.5 million shareholding in BHP Billiton, according to its last annual report.

Clare Short MP will draw attention to the very substantial role the City of London has played in financing mining around the world, including the Philippines, and the existing involvement, in the Philippines, of a number of companies with a British base of operations.

She supports lobbying of the British Government, the European Union and the World Bank to recognise the seriousness of the situation and act in a responsible manner to respect the wishes of the affected communities.

The report includes maps to demonstrate the overlap of mining locations – both existing and proposed – with indigenous ancestral domains, watersheds and areas of environmental importance, all of which are critical for agricultural and food security in the island nation.

The Philippine Government presents mining as “sustainable”, as do the mining companies involved, but many Filipinos reject this. Mining is also frequently associated with generating or exacerbating corruption, fueling armed conflicts, increasing militarisation and human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings. Codes of conduct and standards for the extractive industries conclude that mining should not be permitted in conflict zones.

The London-based Working Group on Mining in the Philippines incorporates the missionary society of St Columban and the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility (ECCR).