

# The People's Resistance and Struggle Against Large-Scale Mining in Mindanao

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*If many of us would rise against these evil forces, in order for us to live  
in a free and just society, then I risk my life.*

- Eliezer "Boy" Billanes  
(*environmental activist slain on March 8, 2009  
in Koronadal City*)

The history of struggle against large-scale mining is as old as when large-scale mining was first introduced on our islands when the Spanish colonialists came in search of gold and spices. As early as the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, various expeditions were sent to find and wrest the gold mines from the natives. Not a single Spanish gold mine was established. Of note were those sent to the Cordillera which were repulsed by the indigenous people. High up in the mountains, the Spaniards were no match to the Igorots, the Kalingas and the tribals who fiercely defended their territories and fought invaders. They must have been the ancestors of Macliing Dulag, the Kalinga chieftain who stood up and fought against the state's Chico Dam project in the early 1980s, a project which would have adversely affected 100,000 Kalingas and Bontocs as it would inundate dozens of villages and hectares of rice fields.

The Lumads of Mindanao also fought against this usurpation of their lands. An example is the uprising of the Kaolo, B'laan, Manobo, Samal and Moro tribes against the colonial landgrabbers. Led by Datu Mangulayon—the uprising spread fast and wide, from the agricultural colonies in Davao del Sur to the towns of Davao Oriental. A unifying symbol of the uprising was the "*dance of labi*" which the colonialists never understood until June 3, 1906 when Datu Mangulayon killed Gen. Edward Bolton. It was reported that the Americans retaliated violently, not unlike the Samar massacre, killing women, men and even children. To appease the colonialists, the Kaolo people circulated the story that Datu Mangulayon had died with cholera. He was, in fact, "smuggled out" to a safer place in Davao Oriental where he is said to have lived the rest of his life until he died of old age.

The oral tradition in Mindanao is rich with stories of resistance against the Spanish and American invasion of the islands. These stories serve as landmarks in the people's continuing march against the invasion of their lands.

Thus, gathered here are some of the most celebrated accounts of the peoples' resistance and struggle against large-scale mining in Mindanao, from the point of view of the victims themselves.

- 1) *A Tradition of Resistance* tells of the struggle of the village of New Leyte against North Davao Mining Corporation in the early 1980s, during the Marcos Dictatorship. The main sources of this article are church people and community organizers who were working under the Social Action Center of the Diocese of Tagum in the 1970s to the 1980s. This included an interview with the head of the Justice and Peace Desk of the Prelature of Tagum, (now retired). Interviews were also conducted with the relatives of Godofredo Guimbaolibot (Ka Paking), and a former resident of New Leyte. Secondary data was also gathered from John P. McAndrew "The Impact of Corporate Mining on Local Philippine Communities" (ARC, 1983) which details the case of North Davao Mining at the time of its establishment in late 1979.
- 2) *More Precious than Gold* is an account of the ongoing protests of the Lumad residents and miners against Apex Mines who are fighting for their ancestral land and for environmental justice. Main sources for this article are the officers of the people's organization *Indug Kautawan* (People Stand Up), documentation from Panalipdan Mindanao, from Kalumaran and various online articles from Davao Today, Bulatlat.Com, Sunstar Davao and Mindanews.
- 3) *Pregnant with Disaster* is a historical report on how the people fought against the mining TNCs--from Western Mining Corporation (WMC) in the 1990s to Glencore-Xstrata-SMI and why, until now, these powerful companies have not been able to operate

in what is touted as the “biggest copper gold deposit in Asia.” Sources for this article included the documentation and primer of SOCCSKSARGENS Agenda on Xstrata-SMI, interviews with residents of Columbio and Tampakan, pastoral letters published by the Diocese of Marbel and the CBCP, various online articles, case studies conducted by Robert Goodland and Clive Wicks, proceedings of the conferences on mining from the Ateneo de Davao University, the relatives and friends of Eliezer Boy Billanes, and mass activists from the community of Bong Mal in Kiblawan, Davao del Sur.

### 1. North Davao: A Tradition of Resistance

*“We do not want large-scale mines. We are against large-scale mines. Leave our villages alone.”*

- A resident of New Leyte, Maco, Compostela Valley

In Mindanao, one of the earliest organized resistance against large-scale mining was in the 70's, during the Martial Law era of the Marcos dictatorship. Notable was the fight of the village of New Leyte, Maco against the North Davao Mining Company (NDMC) of the Elizalde group. It must be remembered that Manuel “Manda” Elizalde was a Marcos crony who headed the notorious Presidential Assistance on National Minorities (PANAMIN) and was awarded vast tracts of logging concessions in mainly Lumad areas of Mindanao. Aside from amassing wealth for his vast logging concessions, Elizalde was notorious for bringing young Lumad women to his ‘harem’ in Manila. He was also responsible for the “Tasaday hoax” where he purportedly discovered stone age people living in the Daguma range (they were in truth ordinary Tboli IPs made to pose for the camera). At that time, to fight against NDMC was to fight against the state, against Martial Law.

John McAndrew, an American anthropologist who documented the impact of corporate mining on local communities in the Philippines described how North Davao Mining penetrated the village of New Leyte:

*“It was June of 1980 that the company approached the community with its plan to construct a townsite or housing area in an upper part of the valley. Nine families were living in the proposed area, farming 16 hectares of land. The community took a strong stand on this issue, insisting that the company makes a full settlement of Php 36 million for the entire valley before any bulldozing of land or any relocation of people took place. NDMC countered the assessment of 36 million. But the community held fast to its demand for a full settlement of all landholdings before any relocation took place...”*

The following month, the administrative manager of NDMC came to New Leyte to talk with the community about bulldozing the area of the townsite as soon as possible. He said that NDMC was there “to develop the mineral resources of the country, on order of the government.” He also promised the villagers a hospital, a relocation site and a full payment for their homes and farms.

At this time, however, at least 25 hectares of land in the valley had already been covered with mudslides from the construction on the roads and the mine sites. NDMC paid a measly Php10 for every coffee plant destroyed.

The villagers of New Leyte stood pat on their demand for a full settlement. They were dismayed to learn that the company had planned to immediately start operations, and dump their mine waste into a tailings pond that was good only for 22 years. Since the projected life of the mine was much longer, the people knew the company had to find other tailing pond sites. They knew Lake Leonard, which gave them their fish everyday, would certainly be affected. But the company, which had a lot of backing from Malacanang and the military was adamant to immediately start operations. McAndrew documents:

*In October 1980, the barangay negotiating panel of New Leyte met with NDMC officials in Tagum, the provincial capital of Davao del Norte and*

*agreed to a settlement of 10 million pesos for all claims in the valley. This figure also included costs of constructing a residential location area up along the mining road and of transporting residents there. According to the agreement, settlers were to receive compensation payment for their crop damages in two releases from the company. One release was to be made in January 1981 and the other later in 1981 when all residents were to be out of the valley.*

In January of 1981, NDMC made money available in the RCBC in Tagum. New Leyte settlers whose names appeared as legitimate claimants were able to draw on this money as payment for crop damages. Payments ranged from Php15,000 to Php 50,000.

To the farmers, who were not used to having cash, a few thousand pesos was already a sizeable amount. Besides, the military had come in and the villagers were afraid that if they pursued their resistance, things could get more difficult for them.

As McAndrew commented "the helplessness and impotency of NL settlers expressed itself in a growing resentment and mistrust of NDMC." In actual fact, the villagers hated the company. They hated it for driving them out of their homes, asserting, at the same time "that it was for the welfare and the interest of the village."

To make things worse, in October 1981 more than 200 people were killed in a gigantic mudslide which swept workers' bunkhouses along Masara river. The investigation report of Davao del Norte provincial fiscal Isagani Fuentes concluded that

*"the tragedy was caused by an engineering blunder on the part of D.M. Consunji, the contractor of NDMC. DM Consunji dumped about 1.5 million tons of excavated materials into the Amakan Creek...which formed an artificial dam about 30 meters high and 80 meters wide. Heavy rains brought about a tremendous amount of water which burst the dam and overrun the bunkhouses below, eight of which were built right on the Masara river."*

It was also reported that the Employees Compensation Commission (ECC) ordered D.M. Consunji Inc. to pay benefits for those who died or were injured in the disaster. Under the compensation law at that time, a worker's life was worth Php12,000.

In November 1981, farmers living in the lowland area dismantled their homes for relocation under the supervision of the military. About 50 of these families rebuilt their homes four kilometers away in the upper valley clearing offered by the company as a relocation site. The other 30 families relocated elsewhere.

The barangay leaders rallied the people. *"Dapat mosukol ta. Dili ta magpapildi. Padayon tang maghiusa"* (We must fight. We must not be cowed. We must unite.)

Their leader, Councilor Godofredo Guimbaolibot, not wanting to give up the struggle, had no other recourse but to go underground with the NPA, where, as the famous "Ka Paking" he continued his advocacy for many years. In the movement, he led the struggle of the mine workers and small-scale miners for fair and just wages, environmental protection and social justice. On 2 August, 1999 on his way to the guerilla front with a mining engineer and two NPA medics, they were captured by the military in a checkpoint. Three days later, their dead bodies were found along the national highway, with signs of heavy torture. In the subsequent investigation conducted by the NDFP, it was reported that Ka Paking and his group were killed by the 71st IB in collusion with a group of local large-scale miners. A funeral march in Tagum attended by more than 10,000 people was held in their honor with many of them carrying placards and streamers demanding justice.

Back at New Leyte, while the villagers may not have been able to retain their lands, nor Lake Leonard, nor receive very little for their crops, this show of resistance became an inspiration for the struggle against

large-scale mining. It was the first open opposition that expressed in no uncertain terms what the people categorically demanded: *"we do not want large-scale mines. We are against large-scale mines. Leave our villages alone."*

*"North Davao Mining Destroyed  
Lake Leonard!"*

(First Person Account of a Church-  
Worker on One of the Earliest  
Large-scale Mines in Davao)

"I didn't understand the issue of large-scale mining until I was sent to New Leyte. I was with the Social Action Center of the Prelature of Tagum and was tasked to document the harassment going on around North Davao Mining.

At that time, the church was very keen on Liberation Theology, or what it called its option for the poor. So we really went out to the barrios to listen to the farmers and do what we can. At that time, that was the Marcos era, documenting what was happening in the rural areas was a very risky business because it was Martial Law and one can be picked up anytime by the military. But there was much to do because Marcos had offered Mindanao, the land of promise, for sale. As in for sale to the highest bidder. There were the multinational banana plantations and there was large-scale mining, and of course there were harassments because the people opposed this.

A few hundred meters from the village was Lake Leonard. Clear and placid, its cool waters provided the fish not only for barangay New Leyte but also for the neighboring villages.

*"This is what we have in our lake,"* Barangay Captain Neri proudly offered us roasted carps and tilapias for breakfast, *"and this will soon disappear once North Davao starts to dump its tailings there."*

*"But not just the lake but our land and our homes, the entire New Leyte,"* he added with much anger. *"So we must fight. And we must teach my constituents to stand up and fight."* Brave words from a Barangay Captain, and during Martial Law at that.

He knew that the harassment going on in the village was not simply the work of the mining guards but of the government soldiers, the AFP itself.

*"I understand that the odds are so much against us...our enemy is no less than the government, of which I am a lowly official. But this leaves us only two*



*choices—to join our exploiters or to fight. We choose to fight.”* The barangay captain added.

But the company used other tactics to win over the barangay captain. He was invited for drinking sprees and happy-happy; he even went to Manila for “rest and recreation.” But one fine day he suddenly suffered a stroke and died. While the family confirmed that the village head indeed died of a stroke, the story spread that he was poisoned by the company.

I remember New Leyte as a beautiful upland village nestled in the mountains of Maco. Cool climate and a rich agricultural land made it one of the most productive farming villages producing all kinds of vegetables—cabbages, string beans, kentaki, tomatoes, pechay, coffee—everything seemed to grow in profusion there. It was the “little Baguio” of Davao and it was easy to understand why the residents tenaciously held on to their lands.

North Davao was then owned by Elizalde, a very wealthy Marcos crony who also wielded power in government. MandaElizalde was the notorious head of PANAMIN which plundered vast forests of the Lumad ancestral land. By virtue of his closeness to the dictator, Elizalde was able to grab logging concessions and mining tenements causing conflict among the Lumad, Moro and Visayans in Mindanao. It was during PANAMIN’s heyday when the war between the Blackshirts and Ilaga escalated. So many people were killed.

After the death of Brgy. Captain Neri, the first councilor, Freddie Guimbaolibot took over. Freddie was even more active and articulate in his stand against the company.

*“We have been offered payment. Over and over again we said NO. But then the company promised so much cash...and farmers are tempted because here in the barrio, money is hard to come by. Not in a lifetime would they see so much cash. Also they bring the barrio officials to go out and drink and eat...but we know this is nothing but sweet talk. Those of us who openly resist are also openly harassed. They put roadblocks on our farms. They would not let us pass. Then there’s the military. They want to relocate us. They want us out. Those who resist are branded as subversives. This company will bring nothing but destruction to my barrio and to my people”* this time it was the first councilor talking to us.



And so it came to pass that the residents of New Leyte had to give in to the wishes of the company. They had no other choice but to receive payment for their lands and farms.

But not so with Brgy. Capt Guimbaolibot. Not content with what happened and still determined to fight, he joined the underground movement of the New People's Army, declaring to one and all that if negotiations, petitions and dialogues fail, armed struggle was the final arbiter, the ultimate solution to the problem.

As if to further validate the ecological destruction that Guimbaolibot so strongly warned about, a very big disaster happened in the excavation site of North Davao. This was in 1981, just before the Christmas holidays.

After weeks of rain and continuous excavation the mountain of waste and rocklitter caved-in on the construction site for the tailings pond. The workers' bunkhouses were buried, submerged in mud and rocks and timber. It happened at night and it was not published exactly how many people died. But we were able to document scores of families searching for their missing loved ones—workers of the Consunji Construction Company and farmers whose homes were located near the construction site. There were sari-sari stores there too. I remember we estimated about 200 people perished in that tragedy. The Hijo River, that's where we recovered some of the bodies. There were women and children.

After this incident, there was intense militarization. People were relocated and the company continued as though nothing happened. Copper and gold were extracted and the tailings full of mercury and cyanide were dumped in the lake. The company grew even bigger and richer until it was acquired by another mining conglomerate.

The farmers became workers of the company or gold-panners, sifting sands from the waste of North Davao. A few continued to farm what they can of the land. Many left the area to try their luck somewhere else; the people became even poorer. And nobody fished in Lake Leonard anymore.

The church also underwent a change. We churchworkers, we were no longer allowed to go to the areas to organize the Lumad. The hierarchy sort of cooled down, (especially when Bishop Reagan was no longer around), preferring to concern itself with purely spiritual matters.

But as for me, I became an activist. It was actually the start of my life-long commitment with the people—organizing, and teaching ordinary farmers and the Lumad to understand not just about large-scale mining but about what’s happening to our land and why we have to unite and stand up in order to defend our rights.

## **2. Apex Mines: More Precious than Gold**

*“Mas bililhon pa sa bulawan kining among panaghiusa. Tungod sa among panaghiusa naatubang namo ang kumpanya.”* (Our unity is more precious than gold. Because we are united we were able to confront the company.)

-A member of Indug Kautawan while picketing the gates of Apex Mines

Four decades later, in the very same area where the village of New Leyte once stood is Apex Mines Inc., currently southern Mindanao’s biggest gold mining company. And just like 40 years ago, Apex has also been opposed by the community, and more so after Typhoon Pablo in December 2012 when the people realized how the destructive mining activities of Apex contributed to the widespread flooding, destruction of infrastructure, homes and the livelihood of the neighboring communities. The water from the Masara River swelled, causing heavy floods that swept away 84 houses, bridges, roads and crops. The overflowing of the Masara River was caused by the company’s dumping of earth excavated from the mountains.

The community through their mass organization Indug Kautawan (a Mansaka term for *People Stand Up*) demanded that Apex pay reparation of 6.9 million pesos. In early March 2013, the masses staged a picket for eight hours against the company. In the initial negotiation, the company admitted its responsibility for the destruction wrought and committed

to put a *riprap* to rehabilitate the river and to repair damaged roads and bridges. The firm also promised not to displace 42 families of small-scale miners at the mine's expansion site. The company subsequently reneged on these promises, forcing the masses to again undertake militant action in support of their just demands

More than 2000 victims of the flooding, converged on the company's premises and maintained a militant picket for 30 hours that completely shut down the operations of the company through the blocking of trucks. The initial response of the company was to organize pro-company community and tribal leaders who has been receiving dole-outs through its Social Development and Management Program (SDMP). Apex claimed that 12 village captains of Masara Lines, along with IP Mandatory Representative Federico Gadong and Municipal Mayor Arthur Rimando held a meeting and adopted a resolution "*conveying firm and strong support to Apex Mining Company, Inc....against all odds. Hereby conveying strong condemnation to the series of mass rally-demonstrations against the company duly organized and initiated by left-leaning groups who are not coming from Masara Lines.*"

The company claimed that after a day the barricade had cost the company 5 million pesos in losses and after 30 hours the company and the masses had reached agreement on a settlement.

The company agreed to pay 3 million pesos for the repair of 84 damaged houses and release 600,000 pesos worth of rice. Apex also acquiesced for the stay of 42 small-scale miners and their families in St. Francis, Teresa village. It agreed to the suspension of APEXs operations in Sagaysagay village to give way to the Mansaka tribe's ancestral domain, prohibition of open-pit mining, repair of damaged bridge in Elizalde and damaged municipal roads covering the villages of Elizalde, Malamodao, Otso, Tagbarus and Limbo, and construction of riprap in the Masara River.

This was a significant victory for the affected community and proves that unity and militant action can prohibit the mining corporations from operating and generating profit. When united, the community wields significant power.

In the past, small-scale miners in the area of Sagaysagay were prohibited from operating because Apex claimed they own the land for their own mining operations. The small-scale miners mobilized themselves and successfully claimed the land for their small-scale mining. However they were not able to adequately sustain their mining operations, and the threat is that Apex will return. Currently the company is telling them “if you can’t mine it then we will.” Two thousand households is threatened with eviction if Apex indeed returns to the area.

The NPA conducted a series of punitive actions in 2012 and in 2014 to pressure Apex Mines to fulfill its commitments, stop further expansion especially in identified watershed areas and “abide by the rules and guidelines of the people’s democratic government with regards to large-scale mining.”

Apex Mines answered by getting more government troops and paramilitary groups deployed to its areas and subject these areas to an intensive military operation. A psywar campaign has been launched in order to create fear and distrust among the residents, small-scale miners and workers. The people are continually harassed and pressured, especially those who are suspected of opposing the policies of Apex mines.

Also, the past three years saw the extrajudicial killing of mass leaders like Monterona, Pedro Tinga and Wilmar Bargas. The military claimed they were rebels and that they were killed in military encounters, although the residents would attest otherwise.

Still, the fight goes on and the people are determined to eventually expropriate what has been theirs all along. Or for now to at least have the company fulfill its avowed social and environmental responsibilities.

### **3. WMC and Glencore-Xstrata-SMI: Pregnant with Disaster**

*“Magdala og katalagman ang mina. Katawhan ang maalaot.” (The mines will bring disaster. The people will suffer.)*

*- Datu Anting Freay (before he was slain by government troops in his home in Tampakan)*

Another landmark in the continuing struggle against large-scale mining is the current case against Glencore-Xstrata-Sagittarius Mines (SMI). The resistance actually started in the early 1990s when the Australian Western Mining Company, (WMC) decided to mine what is touted as Southeast Asia's biggest undeveloped copper-gold deposit. Situated in the triboundary of Sultan Kudarat, South Cotabato and Davao del Sur, WMC was awarded a financial and technical assistance agreement (FTAA) in 1997 for what would be the biggest gold mine in the country. Its concession originally totaled 99,500 hectares (named with different companies to circumvent the law limiting mining concessions to 81,000 hectares). This area spanned agricultural lands, river systems, watersheds and the B'laan's ancestral lands.

At the very onset, the people opposed WMC. And not just the B'laans who were directly impacted by the mining tenement but the majority of the local populace, including the Bangsa Moro along Lake Buluan, farmers in Koronadal Valley and Davao del Sur, the fisherfolk in Malalag and Sarangani Bay. Even the flora and fauna of Bolol Lomot, the beautiful mossy forest of Davao del Sur, had they been able to speak would have vehemently vetoed the mining project.

There is no clear documentation as to the number of rallies, street demonstrations, forums, caravans, prayer rallies, petitions, barricades and other forms of mass protest conducted from the time WMC entered into Philippine soil and until the time it left.

In 2004, the B'laan association La Bugal brought their case to court, contesting the constitutionality of the Mining Act, particularly WMC's FTAA. The Supreme Court, surprisingly, upheld La Bugal and thus declared the Mining Act unconstitutional. The people heaved a sigh of relief; a thanksgiving mass was held and a big fiesta celebration soon followed. But their joy was short-lived. Less than a year later, in December 2004, the Supreme Court reversed its decision saying that *"the Constitution should be read in broad, life-giving strokes. It should not be used to strangulate economic growth or to serve narrow, parochial interests, and the Philippine Mining Act must be followed."* The Supreme Court did not specify for whose economic growth will serve the extraction of our mineral resources. Neither did it

mention the incontrovertible fact, that, after decades of large-scale mining, the Philippines has remained backward and underdeveloped and the rich mining areas (like Caraga region) have turned into the poorest and most marginalized areas of the country.

On the extra-legal side, punitive military actions were conducted by the NPA against the military and paramilitary forces guarding WMC.

Buffeted with so much opposition from both the open democratic mass movement and the armed resistance of the Left, WMC sold its rights to Indophil, an Australian multinational company, with a Filipino subsidiary named Sagittarius Mines, Inc. Indophil later went into a joint venture with the giant transnational Xstrata plc for the Tampakan Project using WMC's FTAA.

Under the auspices of the local company Sagittarius Mines Inc. (SMI), Xstrata quietly continued exploration activities, going into many drilling operations in the hinterland communities of Columbio, Sultan Kudarat; Tampakan, South Cotabato; and in Kiblawan, Davao del Sur. With a capital outlay of US\$5.9 billion, Xstrata-SMI tried to coopt the B'laan leaders by "buying off" community leaders and dishing out "community contributions" in millions of pesos, promising the end of poverty for the rural folk. The company spent millions of pesos for public relations and sponsored TV and radio programs, university researches on biodiversity and environmental protection to create the impression they stood for "responsible mining." Their timeline then was to start open pit mining by 2013.

The company also employed two infantry battalions (the 27<sup>th</sup> IB and the 39<sup>th</sup> IB), a paramilitary group called Task Force KITACO, Alcantara's Blue Guards security force, and later the 'Israeli-trained' Catena security agency to guard the company's premises, personnel and assets. At this time, Gen. Jovito Palparan was reportedly employed as security consultant. The series of extrajudicial killings, abduction and massacre that followed refuted the benevolent image that Xstrata wanted to project.

In April 2007, the anti-mining activist Renato Pacaide of Anakpawis Partylist was shot at close range in the town center of Digos City, a few hundred meters from the City Hall City Police Station. That same year, the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan South Cotabato SecGen was abducted by elements of the Military Intelligence Group. With the follow-up and intervention of local human rights groups and the LGU of Koronadal, he was surfaced after three days, badly tortured and traumatized. But at least he was alive. In 2009, the chairman of the Alliance for Genuine Democracy (AGD) and a strong oppositionist to large-scale mining, Eliezer Boy Billanes was shot dead in the marketplace of Koronadal City. He was murdered near the police station by motorcycle riding men who simply walked away after the carnage. In all these cases, no criminals has ever been caught nor arrested.

While Xstrata denied having any links to these gory events, the fact remains that it was the soldiers and paramilitary groups guarding the company that was involved. For the people, the company's accountability was beyond doubt. Thus, the call that echoed throughout South Central Mindanao was for the company to leave. Graffiti painted on walls and on old rice sacks throughout General Santos City and Davao del Sur said it all—"No to SMI!" and "Xstrata Go Home!"

After Boy Billanes' murder, an even bigger alliance against Xstrata-SMI and against corporate mining was forged. People's organizations, tribal federations, environmental groups, the academe, the Catholic Church (with the Bishops), the UCCP, the Davao Irrigators' Federation and the LGU of South Cotabato and Buluan and other concerned individuals. They all stood up and joined the open mass movement against the company. There was continuing education and mobilization of peasants and Lumads. National and international fact finding missions were conducted. In 2007, a theater youth group from the impacted communities was organized. Through a combination of song and dance and creative drama portraying the hazards and pitfalls of large-scale mining, this theater group generated a most lively discussion among the Lumads and farmers in selected parishes. For three consecutive years, a lively caravan complete with effigies, streamers



and paintings managed to picture out the real score behind Xstrata-SMI. Thousands of people joined these caravans which usually ended on the streets of General Santos City, at the gates of Xstrata's offices where the people padlocked the company gates in a symbolic gesture of resistance.

In 2009, the provincial government of South Cotabato ratified the Environmental Code banning open pit mining from the province. Even with the national government opposing the ban, the provincial officials of South Cotabato, who were supported by the Church and the people's organizations, stood their ground. This created a lot of headache for the company, which could not complete its Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC), causing the delay of its operations.

On March 15, 2014 Cardinal Orlando Quevedo and 20 senior prelates of the Catholic Church in Mindanao wrote President Benigno Aquino to stop the Tampakan mining project because of the following:

- "The destruction of almost 4,000 hectares of forested and agricultural land and biodiversity is against the integrity of God's creation;
- "The dislocation of almost 6,000 surface dwellers, mostly B'laans from their ancestral land is against human rights;
- "The threat to food security and human life through the use of cyanide and heavy metals for processing ores is very real; and that
- "The past killings and future violence as the B'laans will defend their ancestral land—source of food, building material, burial grounds of their ancestors and place of living—will adversely affect peace and harmony."

Marbel Bishop Dinualdo Gutierrez who has been one of the most active and consistent prelates in opposing Xstrata-SMI lamented that the government ignored the petition of more than 100,000 people calling for the scrapping of the mining project.

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