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Mindanao (Philippines): Maguindanao tribes demand end to 'illegal mining' in communities

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MANILA, Philippines — At least 19 clans belonging to the Teduray and Lambangian tribes of Maguindanao province are demanding an end to what they call “illegal mining exploration” in their communities.

The clans have also asked government agencies, among these the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, the Office the President and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, to conduct an immediate investigation and order an end to the exploration.

“We are against mining for the present and future generations of our people and for our ancestral domain which will clearly be devastated by mining,” Rogelio Patricio, who heads the tribal clans, said.

The call of the tribal clans followed the release of the report of a fact-finding mission in Upi and South Upi towns last September [1] that found “illegal mining exploration activities took place in the ancestral domains of (the) Teduray and Lambangian in the municipalities of North Upi and (parts of) Datu Blah Sinsuat as early as April 23, 2014 until September 5, 2014.”

It also accused local government officials of keeping the information on the mining exploration from the affected communities, who are among “the claimants to the 201,850-hectare unified ancestral domain claim of the Teduray, Lambangian and Dulangan Manobo currently pending” before the NCIP.

These activities, said the mission report, not only “violated the sanctity and integrity of the cultures of the Teduray and Lambangian tribes” but have also sown “division in the communities.”

The report stressed that, after the tribes aired their concerns over the, Environment Secretary Kahal Kedtag of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao said no applications for mineral exploration had been filed with his office nor had he issued any permits for the activity.

The fact-finding mission report said the first activity documented by the tribes was the arrival of two helicopters in Sitio Lahangkéb, Barangay Rempes, North Upi on April 23.

In mid-July, groups of men, some of them armed with assault rifles, began digging holes and taking soil samples in the village.

“The community members of Barangay Rempes reported that they have documented 29 holes,” the report noted.

Mission participants said two of the holes were within a kilometer of the Teduray-Lambangian Tribal Justice Hall of the Teduray.

On August 5, a white helicopter with R44 APC3686 on its fuselage, landed in Barangay Renti, North Upi while another helicopter hovered overhead. Foreign-sounding men from the chopper that landed dug a hole and took soil samples.

This same helicopter was seen a month later flying towards Barangay Rifao and then towards Sinepak in Datu Blah Sinsuat town.

Between late July and early September, the tribal communities also reported helicopters landing in Barangays Renti and Rempes and in Barangay Ranao Pilayan in North Upi. In all instances, passengers alighted and took soil samples.

Even more distressing, the mission report noted the increasing presence of heavily armed groups since the mining exploration started.

In July, for example, community members said “a mixed group of known commanders from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front MILF, the Moro National Liberation Front MNLF, members of Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Units CAFGUs, and a member of the Armed Forces of the Philippines known as one ‘Lt. Baylon’,” was seen in the hinterlands of Upi.

But when the tribe members sought a meeting with Upi Mayor Ramon Piang Jr., he “reportedly explained that Mayor Marshall Sinsuat of Datu Blah Sinsuat municipality called him up and requested for security because of alleged threats” against the life of Sinsuat, alleged by a fasandalan or tribal clan organizer.

In August, a group of more than 30 persons, about half of them armed, were also seen heading towards Malibakaw Falls in Sitio Sante Fe, Barangay Looy, South Upi.

The tribe members heard shots coming from the area of the waterfalls and later found anti-mining campaign posters riddled with bullet holes.

On September 4, a larger group of 73 persons, including members of the Barangay Peacekeeping Action Teams, CAFGU and officials of Barangay Nalkan in Datu Blah Sinsuat arrived and stayed near the Tribal Justice Hall.

Two of them men introduced themselves as “engineers McNiel Gaila and Nathaniel Novero from Manila” and said they were “members of an ‘Independent Fact-Finding Mission Team’ whose purpose was allegedly to confirm whether or not minerals could be found underground,” the report said.

The group also took soil samples.

The fact-finding mission said the exploration activities clearly violated the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act, which requires the “Free, Prior and Informed Consent” of indigenous people before any activity within their ancestral domains can be undertaken.

It also urged the Office of the President “to hold to account government officials and public officers and offices identified as being involved in the reported illegal mining exploration activities.”

The fact-finding mission also called on the local governments of North Upi, South Upi and Datu Blah Sinsuat to “immediately declare their territories as no-go zones for mining” and the Commission on Human Rights to “investigate the deployment of CAFGUs and BPATS as private security to entities conducting mining explorations and activities in the indigenous territories in Maguindanao province.”

P.S.

* InterAksyon.com. The online news portal of TV5. December 2, 2014 1:53 PM:
<http://www.interaksyon.com/article/100343/maguindanao-tribes-demand-end-to-illegal-mining-in-communities>

Footnotes

[1] Available on ESSF (article 33733), [Maguindanao Province, Mindanao \(Philippines\): A Fact-Finding Mission to the Ancestral Domains of Teduray-Lambangian and Illegal Mining Exploration](#).