

NEWS RELEASE

Subanen Tribe Urges President Duterte: Reconsider Lopez' Move to Cancel Balabag MPSA

Tribal Chieftains anxious on imminent loss of employment, livelihood and return of illegal miners



'They cannot return.' (TVIRD file photo): Subanen leaders Timuays Casiano Edal and Lucenio Manda (left and right, respectively) both from Bayog, Zamboanga del Sur, and Isis Guilingan of Sindangan (center) from Zamboanga del Norte show their solidarity and irrefutably express their strong opposition to an impending return of illegal miners to Balabag.

Bayog Municipality, Zamboanga del Sur / February 2017 – Two tribal leaders of the Subanen tribe of this town warn about the return of destructive illegal small-scale mining operations in Sitio Balabag once the recommendation of Environment secretary-designate Regina Paz Lopez to cancel the Mineral Production Sharing Agreement (MPSA) of TVI Resource Development Philippines Inc. (TVIRD) is implemented.

“Our regulatory bodies failed to control the destructive and reckless activities of the illegal miners in Bayog since the early 80’s. They destroyed our mountains, farms, rivers and seas until they were effectively stopped by Governor Antonio Cerilles in October 2012 with the issuance and implementation of a cease and desist order by the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) and the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB),” said the 75-year Timuay (chieftain) Casiano Edal – one of the 40 Subanen tribal elders.

Rightful claimants

The unified tribe is one of the biggest peoples’ organizations in the Zamboanga Peninsula that actively supported the implementation of the CDO, seeing the havoc brought by illegal mining operations. They also expressed their deep concern over news of Lopez cancelling the company’s contract with the government on the basis of alleged proximity to a “functional” watershed.

“The perpetuation of child labor made Subanen children – and their parents – slaves in our own homeland. Secretary-designate Lopez’ cancellation of the (Balabag) MPSA will kill our tribe’s only hope for a better future from jobs that will be generated by a regulated mining operation and other benefits that we can enjoy like royalties, social development project, and even tax for our local government,” Edal lamented.

In 2006, the tribe submitted the application for a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claim (CADC) covering land located in this town to the National Commission on Indigenous People’s Commission (NCIP). The application covered 22 barangays in Bayog: Dimalinao, Boboan, Depore, Pulangbato, Dipili, Kahayagan, Liba, Conacon, Bantal, Boboan, Deporehan, Sigacad, Balukbuan, Matin-ao, Datagan, Camp Blessing, Kanipaan, Bonbonan, Depase, Matun-og, Baking and Canoayan.

Bayog is a third class municipality in the province and comprises 28 villages with a total population of 33,059. Majority of its population belongs to the Subanen tribe.

Casualties

“If only she (Lopez) will ask us how unsafe the illegal miners’ operations were before it was stopped, we will tell her how many tribe members – not only from Bayog – died when tunnels collapsed. We will also tell her and President Duterte how many people went missing and how many families were left behind,” said Timuay Lucenio Manda, who is also an elected member of the town’s Sangguniang Bayan (Municipal Council).

“We’ve been there,” said both chieftains in strong opposition to illegal small scale mining. “We condemn and strongly oppose it not only because it destroyed our lands and environment as a whole, but it has brought so much injustice and trouble to Bayog. Its operators abused us by denying the tribe of the royalties we rightly deserved for years,” they reiterated.

While many of the operators became millionaires and were able to run and win in local elections, the Subanens continued to live in poverty while the hills of Balabag and neighboring towns of Siay and Kabasalan in Zamboanga Sibugay town were heavily polluted. Manda reported that tons of cyanide and mercury-laden mine wastes flowed out freely from shallow ponds dug by the illegal miners.

The chieftains also revealed that over 100 tunnels crisscrossed beneath the surface of the gold-rich mountains.

“In their usual press releases to the local and even to the national media, the illegal mining operators often blamed large scale mining companies for destruction of the environment. It really happened to us in Bayog. They accused TVIRD of IP rights violations, when in truth and in fact, the company is not yet even operating until now,” Edal commented.

“One can also understand that many tribe members were the ones who were easily lured and misled by these unscrupulous businessmen because many of us are less educated and are the ones wallowing in extreme poverty,” he said, adding that Balabag is one of the sitios (sub villages) of the town’s Barangay Depore and is part of their CADC application

Condemnation and anxiety

DENR secretary-designate Lopez’ recent announcement on the cancellation of 75 MPSAs in the country brought so much anxiety to the two tribal leaders and their followers. They are part of the different minority tribes in Mindanao who urge President Duterte to reconsider the latest move of Lopez against the mining sector.

“We trust that TVIRD will protect the environment. We are part of the common *tao* in Bayog who are looking forward to economic opportunities that await us once the company starts its mining operations,” said Edal, urging President Duterte not to allow Lopez to cancel TVIRD’s contract.

Manda added that TVIRD was instrumental in helping the government clean-up Balabag from the contamination of toxic wastes.

Hope

They shared that many of his tribesmen dream of someday having medical doctors, agriculturists, lawyers, engineers and career military officials among them – which can only be fulfilled if a mining company will invest in their mineral-rich land and provide educational support, according to them.

“We now have a teacher,” beamed Edal, adding that it’s the only profession that their tribe “can be proud of at present.”

He said he knows their tribe will be prioritized by the company's scholarship program because even before its actual mining operation, it has been agreed as early as its exploration phase that TVIRD will provide a scholarship program for the tribe.

"Actually, even during its exploration stage, a scholarship program was already put in place and we already have scholars courtesy of TVIRD," he said.

"I want to be a mining engineer so that I can be of help to my fellow tribesmen," said 17-year old Dexter D. Edal, a Grade 10 student of J.H. Cerilles State College in Bayog. The young Edal is one of the grandchildren of Timuay Edal whose dream is to become a mining engineer someday.

Green light

Balabag is part of TVIRD's 4,779-hectare MPSA, which already received an approved Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC) in 2013 and Declaration of Mine Project Feasibility (DMPF) in 2016. It also received an approval for its Social Development Management Program from the MGB in May 2014.

"The approval of the ECC confirms that the company has satisfied the requirements of Presidential Decree No. 1586 that will secure Bayog's environment," TVIRD in a statement said. But on February 14, this year the company was among the 75 MPSA holders recommended for cancellation by secretary-designate Lopez.

In an earlier statement, TVIRD President Eugene T. Mateo said that the company's Balabag Project "is not located within the vicinity of any lake, spring or tributary enumerated in the country's list of proclaimed watershed forest reserves or any critical watershed that are included in the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority (NAMRIA) and National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS). TVIRD deems the cancellation of the MPSA to have no merit."

Press photos:



- 1 *Gone are the days when illegal small scale miners destroyed Balabag's natural environment and enslaved the tribes in their own homeland.*



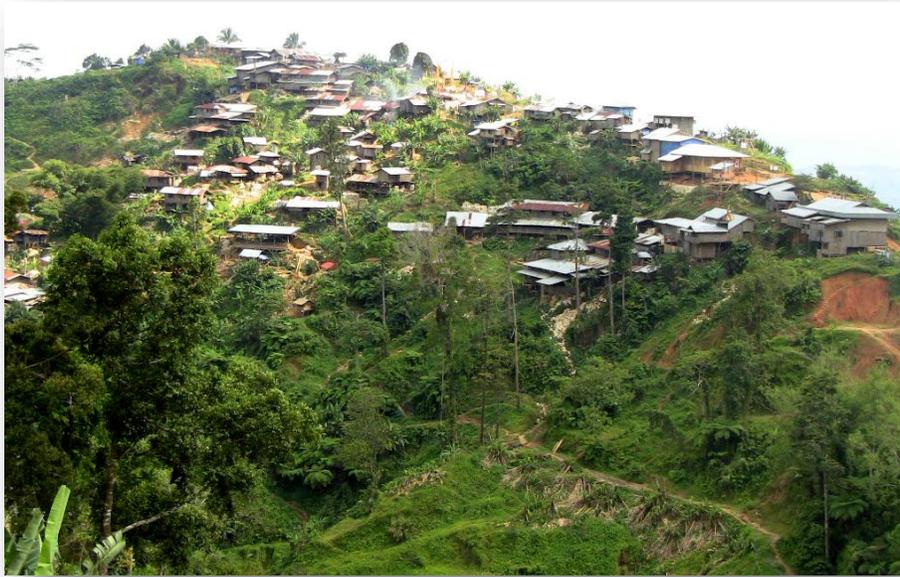
- 2 *Rampant use of cyanide, mercury and nitric acid destroyed the environment and threatened the health and safety of the villagers.*



- 3 **Hard labor.** Minors were hired to carry heavy boulders and rocks and manually crushed these with hammers and steel to be collected by ball mill workers – all these dangerous jobs in exchange for small amount of money to feed their families.



- 4 The political will of Zamboanga del Sur Governor Antonio Cerilles made the implementation of the CDO possible in October 2012. Together with the task force composed of the regular law enforcement agencies of the government, the CDO was peacefully implemented in Balabag.



- 5** *Bayog now looks to a new beginning when TVIRD soon operates in the area. (Above & below before and after photos): The former barracks and shanties of the illegal small-scale miners have been cleared from Balabag Hill and the land has recovered, notwithstanding the need for further remediation efforts.*



- 6 (Above & below before and after photos): TVIRD is presently limiting the entry of civilians to its MPSA area in Balabag – following intelligence reports from authorities revealing the possibility of concealed high-powered firearms, explosives and unregulated chemicals owned by the illegal mining operators. The company also commenced initial environmental clean-up activities and an account of un-engineered mine shafts and other geohazards in the area.

About TVI in the Philippines

TVI Resource Development Philippines Inc. ("TVIRD"), is the local affiliate of TVI Pacific Inc. (TSX: TVI), a publicly-listed Canadian mining company focused on the exploration, development and production of precious and base metals from district-scale, large-system, high-margin projects located in the Philippines. Concurrent ownership of ventures is shared with partner company, Prime Resource Holdings Inc.

The commercial operations of Agata Mining Ventures Inc. (AMVI) mark the third successful mining project that TVIRD brought on-stream in a period of 10 years. The company is committed to exploration and mining practices that promote transparency, responsible stewardship of the environment, and the inalienable rights to life, dignity, and sustainable development of its host communities.

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