

Townfolks Oppose Entry of Mining, Forms Multi-Sectoral Alliance

By Ma. Theresa C. Jabon*

MORE than 200 people representing various sectors— indigenous peoples, farmers, fisherfolks, teachers, students, vendors, employees, laborers, religious leaders and schoolchildren— gathered at the Marihatag Gymnasium on April 2, 2005 during a Mining Consultation-Forum to draw out the people's real sentiments on the pending application for Mineral Production Sharing Agreement (MPSA) of a company named Southern Agusan Mining and Exploration Company (SAGMEC) in Marihatag. The same application, covering an area of 1,920 hectares, included the municipalities of Prosperidad and Bayugan, Agusan del Sur.

The Consultation-Forum, organized by SRDP-PIPESRA, the LGU of Marihatag and the Sto. Nino Parish, paved the way for the formation of the Multi-Sectoral Alliance for Environmental Protection (MAEP) and the unification of a stand against the application for MPSA by SAGMEC.

All the participants to the forum signed a manifesto that opposed the application, saying that any mining exploration, construction and development in the areas will have ill effects on the upland and coastal environments especially the watersheds and fishery and marine resources in Marihatag, which forms part of Lianga Bay. They cannot allow any damage to their agricultural lands as well as to their livestock and will never put at risk the health of the people especially their children. They believe that there are great sociocultural implications of mineral extraction activities and the experiences of many communities devastated by mining operations are lessons that should serve as enough basis for them to decide against any entry of mining, be it exploration or construction and development.

The MAEP submitted protest documents to the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in Caraga Region 13. The protest documents contained thousands of signatures generated thru an education-information campaign up to the Consultation-Forum.

Mr. Rolando Bandibas of the LGU-Marihatag, representing the Upland and Coastal Resources Management Project (UCRMP) and Ms. Alena Pontevedra of Sustainable Rural Development

Project -Program of Infrastructure and Promotion of the Economic Sector in Rural Areas (SRDP-PIPESRA)-Fishery Management Project in Lianga Bay, vowed to continue their protests until SAGMEC's application for mining is totally stopped. They vowed further that MAEP would stand against all other mining applications that may come in their town.

The captains of 12 barangays of Marihatag and members of the Sangguniang Bayan also attended the consultation-forum. Leaders of POs and LGUs of Barangays Bretania and Otieza of adjacent San Agustin municipality, as well as representatives from other NGOs and POs in Surigao del Sur and Caraga Region also attended.

Atty. Tony Azarcon of the Save Surigao del Sur Movement gave an input on Republic Act 7942 or the Philippine Mining Act of 1995. Other resource speakers gave their moral support to the Marihatag townfolks. Sr. Lydia Lascano, Executive Secretary of the Social Action Center of the Diocese of Surigao del Sur, spoke about the struggles of other indigenous peoples in Surigao del Sur against mining and shared the negative impact of mining operations in Cordillera region where her congregation once assigned her. Two leaders from Anislagan Bantay Kalikasan Task Force of Anislagan, Placer, Surigao del Norte shared about their local struggle in opposing and stopping the operations of a mining firm.

A representative from the Davao-based Paglilingkod Batas Pangkapatiran Foundation, Inc. also shared the importance of legal and meta-legal struggles of the local communities against mining. Mr. Bonifacio Ordona, the Regional Director of the World Bank-funded Coastal Resources Management Project in Caraga Region also spoke about the ill effects of mining, especially on their sustainable environmental protection projects in the upland and coastal areas of Marihatag and other nearby towns. Green Mindanao, another NGO based in Cagayan de Oro City was also represented.

Carlota Molinero Fuentes, Project Co-Manager of SRDP-PIPESRA representing the Spanish NGO IPADE, said that she understands the anti-mining stand of the Marihatag people and she knows that many of her countrymen supports, in their own way, such kind of advocacy of Filipino communities.

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