

Forms of Support You Can Extend

Letters appealing to:

Mr. Alfredo Yuchengco
Chairman of the Board
Benguet Corporation
12 San Miguel Avenue, Mandaluyong
Metro-Manila, Philippines

For his company to place under review all mining projects that are destructive of the environment and inimical to the people's welfare;

Secretary Fulgencio Factoran
Department of Environment and Natural Resources
Visayas Avenue, Diliman
Quezon City, Philippines

For his office to take action against the destructive mining operations of BenguetCorp;

The Commanding Officer
Cordillera Regional Command
Camp Dangwa, La Trinidad
Benguet, Philippines

For an end to military harassment of civilians protesting BenguetCorp's destruction of Itogon;

Justice Jose S. Encarnacion
Municipal Trial Court, Itogon
Benguet, Philippines

For dismissal of the cases against some 50 residents of barangays Ucab and Loacan in Itogon, which residents are unjustly charged with Grave Coercion, for their role in protest actions launched against BenguetCorp, and with the Violation of Presidential Decree 463, for their persistence in small-scale mining activities on mineral claims controlled by BenguetCorp.

Letters expressing support to community or workers' organizations in their struggle for collective survival:

Inter-Barangay Alliance of Itogon (IBA)
c/o Jose Cawiding, Convenor

United Concerned Citizens of Ucab (UCCU)
c/o David Dalisay

Tuding Integrated Rural Area Development (TIRAD)
c/o Oliba Plsek

Barangay Gumatdang Consultative Committee
c/o Rosita Bargaso

Any of which may be sent through the
Mining Communities Development Center, Inc.
111 Upper General Luna Rd. Agpao Compound
Baguio City, Philippines;

BTMB-NAFLU
c/o Dominador Solar

MAAGAP-NAFLU
c/o Manuel Binhaon, Jr.

Either of which may be addressed to
Rm. 11 Old Lopez Building
Session Road, Baguio City
Philippines.

Financial contributions for:

Bail bonds and attorney's fees for people criminally charged in the course of their struggle against the destructive mining operations of BenguetCorp;

Economic projects the people are undertaking to provide themselves with alternative income while pursuing their struggle;

Operational expenses for the campaign to save Itogon.

These contributions may be sent to the
MCDC, Inc.

Dollar Account No. 547-24-82
Producers Bank of the Philippines
Baguio City Branch, Session Road
Baguio City, Philippines.

The assistance of experts in:

Conducting a structural study of the silt and tailings dams as well as other infrastructure constructed by BenguetCorp for its open-pit and other bulk mining operations in Itogon;

Investigating the extent of water and air pollution, soil contamination, and damage to vegetation and land forms that BenguetCorp's bulk mining projects in Itogon are inflicting;

Studying in greater depth and breadth the social impact of large-scale mining projects on indigenous populations in the Cordillera region of northern Philippines.

Help save ITOGON



Itogon. This township, located 15 kilometers east of the city of Baguio in the Cordillera mountain region of northern Luzon, Philippines, is home to about 62,000 people who depend largely on mining for their needs and comforts. In 1988, the Philippines' Department of Environment and Natural Resources listed 3,405 pocket miners and 1,050 gold panners in this area. Until very recently, more than 6,000 people here worked the mines of Benguet Corporation and its subsidiary, the Itogon-Suyoc Mines, Inc.

Itogon's terrain is steep. Its soil is rocky and dry, and its wild vegetation consists mostly of pine and cogon grass. But the area receives generous amounts of rainfall through more than half the year. And until very recently, Itogon's Liang and Ambalanga rivers flowed deep and strong. Miners' families here have thus, until recently, been able to maintain orchards and swidden farms from which they could harvest upland rice, rootcrops, vegetables, and coffee beans in modest quantities, as well as fruit in surplus. A number of families that pan gold from the waters downstream of the Liang river have even managed to maintain irrigated rice terraces as well as grassy pastures for cattle.

Itogon's mining and farming communities are considerably stable and relatively self-reliant. They are old settlements, visibly different from the slipshod villages characteristic of the Philippines' current gold-rush areas.

Ancient minesites. Benguet Corporation, the Philippines' largest, most renowned, and oldest surviving gold producer, started operating in Itogon in 1903. But mining as a way of life in Itogon is older than BenguetCorp. It is even older than the Philippines' recorded history. The mines of Itogon were among the sources of the gold that Spanish *conquistadores* saw traded along Luzon's northern coasts when they first arrived here late in the 16th century.

Native oral tradition, as well as the records of Spanish observers, reveal that gold mining and trading was already the main economic activity of people in Itogon during the 17th and 18th centuries. Mining and the trade of highland gold for lowland cattle shaped the independent development of society in Itogon, Baguio, and nearby areas up to the 19th century. This development was only interrupted at the turn of this century with the American conquest of Cordillera mountain populations that the Spaniards had never been able to bring under full control.

Community proposition. United States Army veterans of the Philippine pacification campaign became the first foreigners to prospect extensively for gold and set up their own mining and milling operations in Itogon. The company that would later evolve into BenguetCorp was founded on mining claims filed by such veterans.



Few, if any, of Itogon's inhabitants opposed the prospecting and mining activities of the new foreigners. For one, mineral land no longer appeared as valuable then as it had at the time of Spanish contact. By the time of American arrival, native mining activities in the area had begun to decline. The native gold-for-cattle trade had reached its peak decades earlier, and the accumulation of large herds of cows, bulls, and carabaos rendered unnecessary the intensive exploitation of mineral resources and an extensive commerce in mineral products.

Also, according to Itogon custom, there was no such thing as exclusive ownership of mineral land. Specific mine workings were privately owned, but mineral land, in general, was a community proposition. Unused sections of mineral land could be exploited by anyone from anywhere, so long as he sought and obtained the permission of the community's original inhabitants to settle in their midst and start a mining operation.

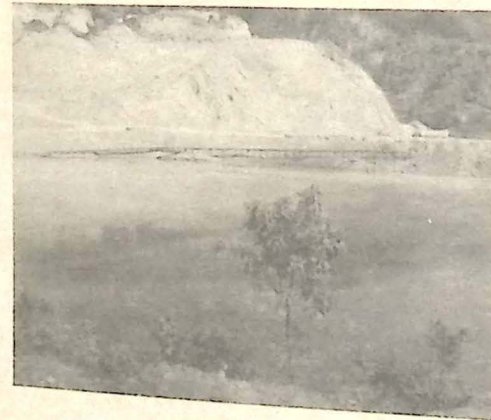
In granting the new foreigners permission to prospect and mine, the native inhabitants of Itogon were under the impression that they could go on pursuing their own economic activities as before, engaging in a little swidden farming, raising cattle, and going underground every now and then to extract some gold for purposes of trade. Little did they know that the foreigners would stake exclusive claims to the mining locations; that, according to both American and Philippine laws, the companies the foreigners would establish and later leave behind could enjoy full ownership of these locations; that the native people's own rights, as provided for by their own customary laws, would be disregarded; that the foreign-established companies would conduct large-scale operations that would force homes, farms, and cattle off the choicest surface lands.

From coexistence to conflict. Today, the claims to practically all of Itogon's mineral locations are in the hands of either BenguetCorp or its subsidiary, by virtue of patents and leases, and through operating contracts or royalty agreements forged with smaller companies and with individual claimholders that no longer find it practical to do their own mining. This has been the situation for decades.

But for decades, also, peaceful coexistence between BenguetCorp and the people of Itogon had been possible. From its beginnings in 1903 up until the year 1989, BenguetCorp tolerated the operations of small-scale miners on claims that the company legally controlled. And where the company had no use for surface land, it made no effort to drive away the occupants. Further, BenguetCorp was perceived to be playing an important role in the region's economy and in society as a whole. Its operations provided employment to thousands of people from within Itogon itself, from all over the Cordillera, and even from the lowlands.

Then towards 1989, BenguetCorp decided on a change of strategy. The large lodes of high-grade ore that the company had been exploiting deep underground were by then depleted. The time had come to move closer to the surface, where either small but rich veins or large low-grade lodes could still be found. Using more machines than manpower for open-pit or surface mining, as well as bulk mining underground, the company could extract such ore deposits at a profit.

The new strategy became operational in 1990. Today, the Antamok Gold Project, the Super Tuding Open-Pit Project, Project XYZ in Acupan, and various other projects are underway. As the projects progress, BenguetCorp will drive more and more small-scale miners from their mine workings, milling houses,



farms, and homes. Already, the company has retrenched some 3,000 of its own mine workers. It is levelling mountains and diverting rivers or using riverbanks as waste dumps. With dust, silt, and tailings from its mining and milling operations, it is polluting the air, killing vegetation, and contaminating the soil and water of Itogon. It is flushing toxic material down the Ambalanga and Liang rivers, which will carry these to the Agno river and the Lingayen gulf in Pangasinan. Farmers and fisherfolk in the lowlands and along the coasts will be the ultimate victims.

The small-scale mining communities and workers' unions in Itogon have waged protest actions in the hope of saving both their present livelihood as well as the land and resources that need to be conserved for the sake of future generations. Because of their organizing efforts, public exposes, mass rallies, and barricades, they have had to endure military harassment, arrest, and detention. Criminal charges have even been filed against some of them.

The people's appeals to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources have gone unheeded because, according to this Department, BenguetCorp has outlined satisfactory measures for the mitigation of its projects' environmental impact. Also according to the Department, BenguetCorp's plan to establish an industrial and residential estate in the area after the completion of its projects are in line with government policy on socio-economic development.

The people disagree.

The People's Calls

- ✦ End Benguet Corporation's monopoly of mineral claims in Itogon.
- ✦ Recognize the right of Cordillera peoples to their patrimony, and respect their customary laws on the use, disposition, and management of land and resources within their own territories.
- ✦ Protect the small-scale miners' right to their livelihood.
- ✦ Safeguard the mine workers' right to employment, just compensation, and humane working conditions.
- ✦ Enforce controls on destructive mining operations, and put an end to environmental degradation.
- ✦ Immediately rehabilitate the devastated areas of Itogon.
- ✦ Implement a comprehensive and sustainable mining communities development program which is pro-people and environment-friendly.
- ✦ Empower the people of the mining communities by facilitating the formation of people's organizations and providing mechanisms for the people's exercise of their democratic rights.