

**STATEMENT BY GODOFREDO C. GALOS, OF MALIPOT, SIOCON, ZAMBOANGA
DEL NORTE, MINDANAO, PHILIPPINES**

TO

**THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND
INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

MARCH 23, 2005 - OTTAWA

Dear Chairman Kilgour and honorable members of this Subcommittee,

My name is Godofredo Galos. I am a husband and a father. I live in the town of Siocon, Zamboanga del Norte, in Mindanao, Philippines. I am a lay minister of the Roman Catholic Parish of Siocon. I am also a farmer and the President of the Federation of Farmers in Siocon. Finally, I am the president of the Save Siocon Paradise Movement that I would like to tell you more about.

I have the privilege to speak before this distinguished body, the most highly respected parliament in the government sector of this country. May this group listen to me and hear me because I have been chosen as a representative of the Filipino people who are the most affected by the present mining operation of TVI Pacific in our municipality. I hope to give you reliable information and to expose more widely my people's clamor for support in their struggle against TVI Pacific.

The Save Siocon Paradise Movement was organized on February 5, 2004 at Holy Cross Parish, Siocon, Zamboanga del Norte. We were only seven (7) persons who attended the first meeting but we represented farmers, fishers and other sectoral organizations of our municipality. At the beginning we had only a simple objective - to be able to preserve, conserve and protect our natural resources and to oppose the mining company operating in our area. But today we have developed our common and specific vision, mission and goal. The Save Siocon Paradise Movement is the first time that we are united - the three communities of our municipality are working together for one goal. We are the Muslims who are fishers in our coastal villages, the townspeople who have rice fields and fish farms, and the Indigenous Subanon in the mountain where the mine is.

Vision: That the people of Siocon have in one common understanding, live peacefully and to develop, preserve and conserve our natural environment for present and for the next generation to come.

Mission: To unite and organized the Tri-people (Muslim, Christian and Indigenous Subanon People) of Siocon in order to have a more strong determination to protect, preserve and to oppose all manner of threats and destruction of our environment, human lives and our local subsistence economy.

Also, the ongoing formation of the Education and Information Campaign in the community specifically of the Tri-people in order to deepen their own understanding in terms of environmental issues, to have more awareness that environment is a great part in human life and ecological aspects can have the greatest effect on our lives whether in positive or in negative.

Goals: To strengthen the group to be well organized. To provide the Education Information Campaign to the most affected communities.

Let me tell you about my municipality of Siocon

Siocon municipality is considered to many as the HIDDEN PARADISE found in the lowlands with big areas of rich fertile soil of rice fields, farmlands, fish ponds, rich forest lands and seas with abundant fishes.

Siocon is bounded by the town of Baliguian in the north R.T. Lim and Tungawan both belonging to Zamboanga Sibugay Province in the East; The town of Sirawai, Zamboanga del Norte in the South and the Sulu sea in the west. The topography of the area is generally mountainous. The western and the northern areas of the town are low fertile plains while the eastern part is mountainous. In the hilly parts are found forests, which are part of the remaining forested areas of Zamboanga Peninsula.

This is our Socio-economic situation:

Siocon is inhabited by Christian's settlers, Moro and Subanon people. Sixty percent (60%) of the population live in the fertile plains. The Moro people who figure about 25% of the population are occupying the coastal areas. The Subanon, who compromise 15% of the inhabitants, are in the upland areas.

Part of Siocon is among the areas identified with rich deposit of gold, silver, copper, zinc, lead and manganese. Its terrain reportedly lies in the gold vein of Mindanao which runs through the mountain ranges of Zamboanga Peninsula.

Mount Canatuan:

Mount Canatuan is a part of Barangay Tabayo. It is located in the mountainous eastern part of Siocon bordering the town of R.T. Lim. The village can be reached by a two-hour motorbike ride through the rough and ascending logging roads cutting across residual forests. The earliest inhabitants of this mountain area were the Subanons.

For the Subanon, Canatuan is a sacred ground. Any destruction would violate their relationship with the land as a gift and source of life from Magbabaya (The God Father).

So now you know what we are trying to protect.

Our Protest:

For many years the Subanon already opposed the mining plans by TVI Pacific. Last March 2004 we learned that TVI Pacific will bring heavy equipment - hired by Alnor Construction – to the mountain to start mining there. We launched a picket protest against TVI – at Barangay Pisawak, Siocon, Zamboanga del Norte. We had a permit for our protest and we were always peaceful. We blocked the road for one month. We supported each other with food and comfort. The heavy equipment was stopped. But after the peaceful group of protestors attempted to bar TVI from taking its digging equipment up to the road to Canatuan we were shot at by TVI Security. Four people were injured by shrapnel, including the leader of the Save Siocon Paradise Movement, and Timuay Macario Salacao – an old man and respected Subanon Chieftain and member of the Seven Rivers Council who was grazed on the head.

The sight of mining equipments alarmed the entire Siocon people that prompted the creation of the SAVE SIOCON PARADISE MOVEMENT. We have a very clear position as a people - NO TO MINING.

Guided by one common vision to protect and preserve the environment, the people of Siocon vowed to save the environment from any form of destruction by peaceful means. As a people, we invoke our constitutional rights to act in saving the patrimony and sovereignty for the sake of our existence and for the future generation of our community.

The Siocon people is now demanding from the Philippine Government and concerned agencies like Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Mines and Geosciences Bureau and National Council on Indigenous People to cancel the Mineral Production Sharing Agreement of TVI, to remove the mining equipments from Siocon and to dissolve the creation of COE in Canatuan.

We seek support moral, financial and legal from other environmentalist groups outside Siocon to help us, in our demands and to advocate our cause to Save Siocon- the paradise and its people as well.

Our Observation of Negative Impact:

Farmers: We have experienced our harvest goes down due to some effect derived of water that we use for irrigation from the river. The water from the river is not good anymore. Rice diseases are rampant and undetermined and can no longer be identified by Agricultural technicians. It is not bacteria nor even fungus attacking the rice plants. The rice leaves become reddish and yellowish and its fruits are now always at minimum yields. Because of this we have very low farmer's income. This is the observation we have in the initial operation of TVI. We see that this will be aggravated more and more, because as of now TVI is in the stage of full blast operations.

It is not far fetched that our rice fields will one day suffer what has happened to the paddies of BOAC, Marinduque in Luzon, Ormoc, Leyte and Sipalay all from Visayas and even in Sibutad, Zamboanga del Norte in Mindanao which was filled with siltations when the mine dams in the mountains burst.

Fisher folks : In 1990 to 1999- fishponds farms in our rivers had good harvest of milkfish (bangus) prawn fry and shrimps and crabs, etc. They were able to have harvest at 3 times in a year and have an income of P 54,000.000.00 millions per year with in an area of 450 hectares. But in the year 2000 up to the present they started to experience loss of their fish farm production. There are many deaths of prawn fry and fish fry and including crabs due to river siltation that affects the water quality and most of all the high toxic chemicals especially CYANIDE and other more poisons chemicals that contaminates the rivers and ponds. As of now, this is only an initial operation of TVI and it is having that impact with our lives and means of living that will hinder us to achieve our common goal to uplift our life increasing harvest and income through our fish farming.

Basically, Large Scale Mining is the detrimental to the people's lives and means of livelihood.

Coastal area- the Muslim Community

The Muslim group people in Islam faith- living along the coastal area is about 27.28% engaged in fishing industry. The coastal area near the rivers is very abundant in terms of marines and aquatic resources prior to the entering of TVI mining and its operations. But upon the commencing of TVI's operations-the coastal area experience an effect and loss of its resources. There is now scarcity of fish. Families depending on these industries are finding difficulty to sustain their families in shelter, foods, clothing, medicines and education or their basis needs. Some fish have diseases of the skin and even the people who are used to walking in the river are having rashes on their skin now. These are all dire to the effect of water contaminations from the rivers coming from the mountain of Canatuan where the TVI Mining company is operating.

Militarization:

Since it arrived, TVI has employed security personnel to protect its operations and staff from attack, and to prevent the entry of items needed by the people living in that mountain community. Specially those opposing their operations. There have been numerous protest against TVI, and security staff have been the subject of reports of abuses in Canatuan, the human rights violations.

TVI has sought to protect its interest in two main ways - setting checkpoints on the roads around Canatuan and establishing private army. Checkpoints on roads have become a regular feature of Subanon life since TVI arrived. Checkpoints fully controlled by Special Civilian Armed Auxiliary (SCAA). They are responsible of barring people from entering in their homes and farms. Specially those known to be opposed to the mine and the names are listed in the checkpoints logbook for being banned to enter in the area.

Harassment:

TVI has repeatedly accused tribal leaders and their relatives and the many picketers from last March 2004 as being those known opposed to their operation. Also family households residing in the vicinity of the mine are threatened. Company personnel has ordered and demanded to eject people from that area by intimidation and by forceful

manner. But the company has no proper right and authority to demand ejection of families. Because a person has the right to live, to possess property to self determination and no person shall be deprived of their living and freedom and liberty without due process of Law. (Philippine Constitution, Bill of Rights).

The Struggle Continues:

We agree with a case study report on our situation from Christian Aid that — if Canatuan is a test case of what happens when a community commits itself to working through the officials channels to protect indigenous rights and community wishes then communities elsewhere should have the gravest concern. Mining causes terrible political divisions in our community and raises questions that desperately need answers as to whether it is abusing its positions and exploiting the local people. Although there is evidence that TVI personnel have committed abuses and misrepresented local opinion the company has been allowed to continue to develop a mine. It is a sad but inevitable result of such pressures that the community is now full with division and conflicts. This is compounded by the context of armed conflict that affects our whole region. We do not believe that this gold mine could ever provide benefits to us, it is only causing us problems.

We believe that what must happen is suspension of operations and withdrawal of company's militia.

The case of TVI in Canatuan shows the truth about promised corporate responsibility and the reality of the community which is being torn apart. For the indigenous people (IP's Subanon) and their neighbors mining has meant pollution and social upheaval. The Philippine Government is failing in its duty to protect its citizens, particularly indigenous people, from what many Filipinos call development aggression. The negative impacts of large scale miners- social environmental economic and political- out weight the potential benefits. This has led to conflict as communities stand up for their rights in the absence of adequate protection from the state.

Mining cannot alleviate poverty. It actually causes poverty of local communities. The evidences can be gleaned not only from published literature but also by visiting the mining areas in our country and actually see the existing environmental destructions and poverty situations.

Conclusions:

The large scale mining company of TVI in Mount Canatuan, Siocon, Zamboanga del Norte, Philippines, their operations created chaos and divisiveness between indigenous peoples and ultimately disastrous to humanity as experienced. We do not want it to happen for history repeats itself. Revitalizing the mining industries at the expense of the people is contrary to sustainable development as envisioned by majority people. For Sioconians, the grains of rice and the fresh fish is the very GOLD for us... But the gold bars kill our rice and fish.