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The Need to Protect Indigenous Peoples from Large-scale Mining in the Philippines

A Solidarity Statement from KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives

February 2, 2005

KAIROS strongly supports the upcoming Church People's Conference on Mining in the Philippines. It shares the view of the Ecumenical Consortium for Just Peace that large-scale mining has overwhelmingly negative impacts on communities and the environment, and is particularly concerned about the adverse effects on indigenous peoples.

KAIROS takes a principled, rights based position on extractive industries that promotes and defends the recognition and protection of Indigenous peoples' rights, including the fundamental human right to self-determination, the right to land and resources, and the principle of free and prior informed consent (FPIC). FPIC gives indigenous peoples control over developments affecting them and their lands, territories and resources; enables them to maintain and strengthen their institutions, cultures and traditions; and allows them to promote their development in accordance with their own aspirations and needs.

Although, the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of the Philippines upholds FPIC, indigenous land and identity rights in the Philippines are most threatened by international large-scale mining interests that disregard this important principle. The contravention of FPIC generates conflict and results in human rights violations against those who continue to oppose mining operations. As large-scale mining proceeds, socioeconomic disruption, mass displacement, and environmental devastation are left in its wake. This is tantamount to the destruction of indigenous peoples' societies, cultures and economies given that their identities are so closely intertwined with the land.

There is an urgent need for stronger legal protection and enforcement of indigenous rights at both the national and international levels. The Philippines and world community cannot afford to lose the indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices which contribute to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment.

Safeguarding the rights of indigenous peoples is crucial to their survival and that of all humanity.