

**APOSTOLIC VICARIATE OF PUERTO PRINCESA CITY
APOSTOLIC VICARIATE OF TAYTAY**

**Pastoral Letter of the Apostolic Vicariate of Puerto Princesa City and the
Apostolic Vicariate of Taytay**

“This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. 2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.”

(1 Corinthians 4:1-2)

Beloved Christians of Palawan,

We, the bishops of Palawan, are one in calling for action on an important issue in the province. Palawan is known as *the Last Ecological Frontier of the Philippines*. Although so much destruction to the province has been caused by the commercial logging activities it was subjected to for a long period of time, which only the wealthy elite and not the Palaweños benefited from, there remains to be more than 50% of natural forests in Palawan, including old-growth forests. There are plants, trees, and animals which can only be found in our province. We still have 60,033 hectares of mangroves. Around 30% of all mangroves in the Philippines can be found in Palawan, and almost all old-growth mangroves are here as well. Our oceans remain rich in fish and corals, though so much of these have also been destroyed by illegal fishing. The natural resources we still have should be protected. Let us put a halt to its total destruction.

One of the biggest threats to the natural resources of our land and seas is large-scale mining. Mining companies cut the trees in our forests. In 2016, DENR issued a *special tree-cutting permit* (STCP) and allowed a mining company to cut 27,929 trees. This same company is now applying to cut an additional 8,000 trees. This year of 2024, DENR granted another mining company an STCP to cut 52,200 trees. So many more trees will be felled and cut down for them to dig up nickel and other minerals from the earth. Not only our mountains are being ravaged, but also our soil in the face of rains and flooding. Rivers are being poisoned, threatening our health. Mining brings about pollution to our shores and oceans, causing death upon our corals and forcing artisan fisherfolk such as lobster fry catchers out of work. Even surrounding lands not yet mined are affected as these are likewise drowned in pollution. Whenever rains come, flooding also occurs in many areas, causing the destruction of our brothers and sisters' homes and crops.

At the moment, there are 67 exploration permit applications in the province all over the mountains of Coron, Taytay, Araceli, Dumarán, and Roxas in Northern Palawan. There are many more applications in the mountain ranges of Puerto Princesa, Aborlan, Narra, Sofronio Española, Brooke's Point, Quezon, Rizal, and Bataraza, and even in the island municipality of Balabac. The total area covered by all these applications amount to nearly 200,000 hectares worth of land. There are currently 11 active and existing *mineral production sharing agreements* (MPSAs) with operating mining corporations in the province. Their operations cover an equivalent of 29,430 hectares—an area almost as large as the municipality of Balabac. Existing mining applications mean there is an intent to mine large-scale. What a pity for Palawan! The international community knows us because of our lush

forests, clean shores, bountiful corals, and thick mangrove forests. The world will forget us once our environment is destroyed.

Mining is not 'sustainable'. It destroys forests and various wildlife species as its operations dig lands for minerals. While the law states that mining concessionaires are mandated to rehabilitate the lands they decimated, this does not happen in reality due to the monitoring deficiencies of the DENR and other government officials who are remiss in the performance of their duties. It is saddening to learn about the cries of our people regarding monies used to secure positive votes and endorsements for the sake of mining projects. Of the 3,000 hectares that have been mined in Narra, Española, Quezon, Brooke's Point and Bataraza, not even a fourth of this has been rehabilitated for there is truly no responsible mining in Palawan.

There is no responsible mining in the country and in Palawan. Logic likewise provides that for as long as it is not mined, the minerals contained in our land will remain. **We therefore call for a moratorium or suspension of the approval of any mining application and/or expansion for a period of 25 years.** Let us wait for a thorough study and accurate mapping of mining *no-go zones*, such as our old-growth forests and watersheds. Let us wait for adequate technologies and industries that can process our minerals, raise its value, and enable sustainable livelihoods in our country. Let us ensure first that the approved mining operations in our country today have the capacity and will to restore the mountains and forests they destroyed.

We urge the members of our Provincial Board to pass a moratorium on mining in Palawan. We call for them to stand on the side of good and prioritize the protection of Palawan over political interests or the interests of mining companies. This is a test of their heart for nature and Palawan. The passage of a moratorium ordinance is within the powers of a local government, and is not contrary to national regulations or pursuits. In the MIMAROPA region, only the province of Palawan remains to have no resolution to stop mining. Mindoro, Marinduque, and Romblon all have their own respective moratorium ordinances. Municipalities and cities have also issued such moratorium ordinances. The City of Puerto Princesa is an example, having previously issued a resolution to deny large-scale mining within its premises.

We heard from the Holy Bible that we are the Lord's shepherds over all His Creations. Let us be accountable to Him. **We now ask all Palaweños to sign our petition to adopt an ordinance putting a stop to mining in Palawan for at least 25 years.** *Yes to moratorium!* This is the cry of our Mother Earth; it is the cry as well of our farmers, fisherfolk, and indigenous peoples who are most affected by the destruction caused by mining. This is the cry of all those who believe that they have a duty to protect Palawan from environmental ruin.

Your fellow shepherds,

(Sgd) **Bishop Socrates Mesion, MSP, D.D.**

Apostolic Vicariate of Puerto Princesa

(Sgd) **Bishop Edgardo Juanich, D.D.**

Apostolic Vicariate Emeritus of Taytay

(Sgd) **Bishop Broderick Pabillo, D.D.**

Apostolic Vicariate of Taytay