

## **How Business Companies Contribute to Destroying Our Common Home: The Experience of the Diocese of Marbel**

Fr. Jerome Millan, Director

Social Action Center, Diocese of Marbel, Philippines

12 December 2024

---

Good morning, good afternoon, or good evening to everyone!

The Diocese of Marbel, where I came from, is located in the southernmost part of the Philippines – in the island of Mindanao. It covers two provinces and one chartered city. It is comprised of 30 parishes.

The two provinces and one city are rich in natural resources, particularly minerals such as gold, copper, coal, and limestones. In fact, one of the municipalities (called Tampakan), is considered as having the largest deposit of gold and copper in the Southeast Asia region. Presently, there are two business companies that have been granted mining permits by our government. One company is set to excavate gold and copper in Tampakan municipality and the government-approved mining area is part of the ancestral domain of an Indigenous People group called B'laan. The other company has started coal mining operation in a village of another municipality called Lake Sebu, displacing hundreds of migrant residents and exposing them to the hazards of coal mining. Additionally, numerous business companies have sought permit for small- and large-scale mining operation in other parts of the diocese. Interestingly, one company applied for limestone quarrying in one area for a period of 165 years.

One of the two provinces, the Saranggani Province, faces the Saranggani Bay that abounds with marine resources. Currently, small and big companies have established shrimp farms along the coasts. The operation of these shrimp farms uses toxic chemical that pollutes the seawater and prevents the residents from freely swimming in the seawater.

What strategies do these business companies use to get government's approval or permit for mining and other environmentally destructive business operations?

1. During national and local elections, they provide financial and other forms of support to candidates who favor their business interests. Sometimes, they field their own candidates to ensure that their business operations get legislative approval, when necessary.
2. They influence and give favors to high-ranking officials of relevant government agencies.
3. They also influence and give favors to leaders of opposition groups.
4. They help in constructing roads to the mining site.
5. They release false or incomplete information, make false promises such as employment, mislead, or directly coerce residents of the mining areas into selling their land parcels to them.

They usually do this in connivance with local government agencies. To unyielding residents, they resort to physical and emotional harassments.

6. To pacify opposing leaders and residents and win them, they provide livelihood support and/or certain cash amounts to them. If they fail to sway leaders to their side, they designate their own community leaders and provide them cash and other material goods including vehicles. Moreover, they provide scholarship grants to children of certain families and limited jobs to community members.
7. As they provide socioeconomic support to community residents, they appeal to their emotions by telling them that they are there to help alleviate their problems and by asking them what has the government and the church done for them.

The operation of the mining and other business companies violates people's human rights such as the right to free and prior informed consent, right to food, right to health, right to safety and protection, among others.

What is the Diocese of Marbel doing or has done to address the problem?

1. Educate the members or parishioners of its 30 parishes on the evils of mining.
2. Launched numerous signature campaigns urging the local government to stop the mining operations.
3. Launched mass actions to protest the attempt of one mining company to have a local ordinance or policy that prohibits open-pit mining amended.
4. Provide legal and psychosocial support to community residents who were physically harassed or have experienced any form of coercion from the mining company.
5. Wrote and urged the Philippine President to cancel the extended mining permit granted to the company that operates in Tampakan. Having received no response or action, we filed a legal case against the government agency that extended the mining permit, questioning the constitutionality of its action.
6. Launched an ecology program that centers on the rediscovery of indigenous foods and revival of indigenous food systems to care for our people and our common.

Thank you for giving us the time and space to share our experience at the Diocese of Marbel.