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Protests erupt over Manicani mining permit renewal

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Different groups gather outside the office of the Eastern Samar Provincial Board to protest the renewal of the permit of a nickel mine in Manicani Island, Oct. 27, 2017. **ALREN JEROME BERONIO**

BORONGAN City – Permit renewal requested by a mining company has the Church and many residents worrying about the possibility of further destroying the environment of Manicani, a small island off Eastern Samar.

Hundreds of people attended an anti-mining rally in the province’s capital on Friday to appeal on the government not to renew the exploration licenses of the Hinatuan Mining Corporation which expired this month.

The protesters included many residents of Manicani in the town of Guiuan and were joined by some local church leaders.

No economic progress

Borongan Bishop Crispin Varquez, in a message read by a priest during the rally, argued that HMC’s permit should not be renewed to end the further “suffering” of the people.

“I don’t believe that mining brings economic progress to the area and to its people,” said Varquez, urging public officials to use their power “for the benefit of the people rather than for their detriment.”

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To further drive his point, the prelate cited the mining operations in the historic Homonhon Island, also in Guiuan, which has been operating for more than two decades.

According to him, majority of the people in the island remained poor “and have been become poorer.”

“Instead of bringing them progress, mining has damaged their farms, their source of water, and the marine life surrounding them,” Varquez said.

“Ordinary fishermen and farmers and their families are struggling to live, even [worse] will happen in Manicani or this very small island,” he added.

The HMC, an affiliate of Nickle Asia Corp., the country’s largest producer of lateritic nickel and one of the largest in the world, has been seeking to renew its permit for another 25 years.

Endorsements from the local government

The mining company already secured endorsements from the four barangays of Manicani and the Guiuan local government.

On Oct. 9, the Eastern Samar Provincial Board also issued a resolution supporting the renewal of the HMC’s mineral production sharing agreement (MPSA).

They also called for the lifting of the suspension of mining operations on the island.

HMC operations have been suspended since 2002 over allegations of human rights and environmental violations.

Fr. Juderick Canlumpinao, the diocese’s social action director, said several years after the suspension of mining operations, the island has yet to fully recover from the destruction it caused.

“We are really disappointed by what happened. We are appealing that they revoke the resolution,” said the priest. **WITH REPORTS FROM ALREN JEROME BERONIO**

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