

A chronology of Meares Soputan Mining violations in Rinondoran Bay

The bay of Rinondoran is a small area but well known for its outstanding fishing results. As well as neighbouring bay of Batuputih it belongs to the regency of North Minahasa, North Sulawesi Province. At nighttime the visitor can witness hundreds of sparkling petromax gas lamps which the fishermen light on their fishing platforms known as bagan or rakit to attract the fish. There is no disturbance, and only occasionally the voice of a fisherman singing in the tranquil night can be heard.

There is an unwritten statement of understanding valid here if the motorized tuna fishing boats pass by that they have to switch off their lights as those would disturb the bagan fishing. The social pattern in these traditional fishing communities is not much different from elsewhere in Indonesia, i.e. well back behind modernization, but at least the people are proud to say that their earnings allow them a decent life and to send their children to school even through to high school.

It is a peaceful life which is only disturbed occasionally by vicious violence connected to family or land disputes. But clashes and rows are forgotten when everyone attends the church service on Sundays which is a strong and central element of peoples social life here in the coastal Minahasa area.

It is into this bay that the Australian Gold Mining Company Archipelago Resources Plc with its Indonesian subsidiary Meares Soputan Offshore Mining Ltd. (MSM) planned to dispose of its tailings with a volume of more than 10 billion metric tons over an estimated operation time of six years. And it is in this bay also that MSM started to build a jetty to deliver bulk goods and building materials to their mining site. From the very beginning though the company met with a strong resistance of the local communities which almost entirely tie their lives to fishing. The reasons of not accepting the mine are basically two:

1. They reject tailings in either water, or on land or in the air as they fear a second Buyat case (which is only four hours away and where thousands of people were severely contaminated due to the American gold mine Newmont Minahasa).
2. They reject the disposal of tailings and the construction of a jetty as they fear for their fishing results, means mere existence.

The company never took this seriously, but instead started to recruit local village elite bribing them for their cause and handing out so-called community development financial help. They also baited locals with offering well paid though short-term labor contracts which in an area with rare job opportunities is a big temptation. Horizontal conflicts within the communities were prone between those rejecting and those profiting from the company, and it seems they were even conscientiously sown by the company and blind-eyed by the regency's government.

II. Struggle August 2005 – November 2006

In August 2005 MSM made the first effort of constructing a jetty in the Rinondoran bay, but the pillars were viciously removed by hundreds of angry villagers. MSM reacted in reporting the case to the regency's police who then put charges against 36 villagers. There was no NGO whatsoever then that accompanied the locals.

Between September and November the locals of the districts East and West Likupang, and Bitung started to organize themselves into what was then called Alliansi Masyarakat Menolak Limbah Tambang (AMMALTA, Peoples Alliance against tailings) and asked the local NGOs Yayasan Suara Nurani (YSN), WALHI and JATAM to advocate their case.

November 2005 saw a seminar on the beach of Rinondoran that was attended by member of regional representatives house Aryanthy Baramuli Putri, for the provincial governor the head of the Environment Department Ir. Herry Untu, for the regency's government the head of the forestry division Ir. Octavianus Lingkubi, several academicians from the provincial university as well as various concerned environmentalists. The outcome of the seminar was that the environmental impact assessment analysis (EIA) held by MSM had expired.

At the end of November a delegation of ten AMMALTA members left for Jakarta to represent the findings and reasons why they reject the gold mining company. Their road-show took them to the two houses of parliament, the ministry of environment, the head of the police forces, the British embassy and other relevant addresses. As an outcome of their journey in December 2005 there were two special investigation commissions sent to North Sulawesi to look into the case. While one parliamentary commission heard the complaints of thousands of concerned villagers in Batuputih, the other commission after having visited the mining site was held up by paid "pro mine" demonstrators and couldn't continue their journey to Batuputih to meet the villagers. As a result of the investigation a letter of the Ministry of Environment stated that the EIA held by MSM had indeed expired as it wasn't used for more than three years since its issue and the production plans had been changed. MSM was asked to produce a new EIA.

On the 5th of June 2006 AMMALTA together with other NGOs conducted peaceful actions during the international day of environment.

On the 4th of July 2006 in an attempt to by-manuever the production of a new EIA and instead just revise the old one had secretly invited bribed village elites to a so-called public hearing (which is a central element of the revision) in order to manipulate their case in a way that local communities were "happy to accept the mining enterprise". This was known by AMMALTA though, and an ad-hoc

AMMALTA delegation demanded to enter; as this was refused by the security forces AMMALTA prevented the village elites from entering either. This attempt of manipulation of public opinion by MSM was widely commented in the local media.

On the 13th of July AMMALTA successfully staged a mass demonstration of between 3500 to 5000 coastal people against the gold mine which started in the fishing harbour of Bitung, led via the regency administration in Airmadidi and ended in the provincial capital Manado. This demonstration was meant as a true and instant expression of people's opinion on the mining operation and had to be heard by the EIA commission as it was transmitted in all even the national media. One newspaper called it the largest environmental demonstration in Indonesia so far.

On the 4th of August there was a pre-EIA hearing held at Gran Puri hotel Manado where AMMALTA expressed again its rejection against any kind of tailings. Another hearing on the 27th of September had MSM present two alternatives, i.e. submarine tailings disposal or tailings storage facility on land. AMMALTA tried to present their reasons why they accept neither option, but those were not commented by the EIA evaluation team "due to time reasons".

As several aspects violating currently valid laws were not adequately considered by the national EIA evaluation team as was summarized during a public hearing organized by AMMALTA in the provincial university, AMMALTA decided to undertake a follow-up visit to Jakarta. Three AMMALTA members visited the Minister of Environment and several parliamentary commissions between October 16 and 19.

III. Sea barricade and recent resistance against MSM

Thursday, November 9th 2006

- At dawn the fishermen in the bay of Rinondoran are startled by a large freighter (tongkang) trying to anchor in the bay of Rinondoran. The issue goes that this is the first transport of the production mill which is to be shipped in from Chile.
- Between 8 and 10 am hundreds of fishermen gather in their boats around the freighter. Several of them climb up to the barch to enquire from the captain what the load is. According to the captain the freighter carries sand from Palu/Central Sulawesi, but the men are suspicious as the load is covered and not shown to the people.
- Emotions fly high as the peaceful enquiry is met by Brimob forces (military police) with pointing their guns at the fishermen, as is witnessed by Tajuddin Hema from Kalinaun village when he asks the captain to refrain from deloading the freight in the bay of

Rinondoran, pointing at hundreds of fishing platforms, “ Our and our families’ lives are dependent on the sea and its contents. “

- There are two MSM staff onboard the freighter as well, i.e. Jacky Sumampou and Deni Sompi.
- As there are more and more fishing boats approaching the freighter the captain decided to pull-out of the bay. The people still guard their beach as they are afraid the freighter might return.
- As the people see two of the company Mitsubishi 4WD cars appear on the beach and entering the house of Dina Sasuwuhe, they get very angry and tell the drivers to get off. One driver, Fuji Halim SH, instantly sets off. The other driver is a Brimob and refuses to leave.
- At twelve o'clock all of a sudden a truck with Brimob arrives and starts to seize knives and machetes from the fishing boats. As the fishermen utter their protest to the officer in charge, AKP Simatupang, they are met with arrogance
- Finally the people disperse as the freighter is not seen back.

Friday, November 10th 2006

- Since the early morning the locals witness the company moving heavy equipment and trucks to the beach of Rinondoran, obviously to meet the loading of the freighter Bangka Karita that is in the bay. As the people are still united in preventing the freighter to enter, more and more people, also women and children, gather on the beach. At noon there are trucks with police force from Manado being rushed in, several hundred, according to eye-witnesses. At dusk the tension is increasing as there are no lights, more and more people are coming down to the beach to guard. The fishermen are from Rinondoran and Kalinaun villages who from the beginning rejected the gold company.
- The fishermen move their platforms and boats in a way to create a sea blockade and prevent the freighter from coming to the shore.
- MSM makes attempts to persuade the platform owners to accept money in order to give way for the freighter, but this attempt is refused.
- The atmosphere further heats up as policemen make Helpi Laehe, a fisherman from Rinondoran bend down and beat him up as they find a rubber stone thrower (ketapel, bidik) in his possession.
- Around 9 pm several tuna fishing barges appear and circle around the freighter, decided to attack it if it still refuses to comply to the peoples’ wishes. Finally the freighter takes off.
- The people start to disperse at around 10 pm. Several policemen who don’t wear uniforms circle around the village to arrest Tajuddin Hema, but can’t find him.

Saturday, November 11th 2006

- In the morning there are rumors that the freighter will give it another try around midnight, thus more and more people from the fishing communities Batuputih, Kalinaun and Rinondoran stand-by ready to chase the freighter away. Whatever will happen, the people confirm they are decided that they will never accept the operation of MSM in their bay which their livelihoods rely upon.

Sunday, November 12th 2006

- While the locals are still attending the Sunday morning church service, MSM busily moves their trucks towards the beach again, and the freighter is seen back as well ready to deload. Two fishermen, Yosafat and Helpi, try to climb up to the freighter, but are put off policemen not wearing uniforms by pointing their guns at them from low distance on the sea.
- Hearing the news the people leave the churches quickly and gather again their boats in the bay. There are many Brimob in civil clothes patrolling on the beach.
- At 2.30 pm the emotions run out of control as several Television teams arrive in the location. The angry masses turn over a wooden safety post of the company and set it afire. They want the world to know that they will never accept MSM.
- Around 3.30 pm the masses disperse.

Monday, November 13th 2006

- Two men from Rinondoran, Roy Kereh and Lexy Kereh, are arrested by the district police the very moment they themselves visit the police office to report that they were attacked and beaten by policemen in civil clothes. The arrestment takes place violating the valid procedures, and the two men are put at charge with being involved in the destruction of the mining post.
- The local media extensively cover the news about the attack on the post.

Tuesday, November 14th 2006

- The Governor of the Province North Sulawesi, S.H. Sarundayang, is cited in the newspaper Rakyat, page 3, " Order MSM to stop all activities until there is not a decision of the Department Of Environment about the EIA"
- The public relations officer of the Provincial Police Headquarters, Benny Bella, is cited in Manado Post, page 4 that the three key persons of the attack on the post are already arrested.

Wednesday, November 15th 2006

- A group of people from the villages Rinondoran, Kalinaun and Batuputih visit the provincial police department to report MSM as having committed environmental crimes. They reason that MSM neither holds a valid permit to construct a jetty nor a permit to change the bed of a river in their concession area. The report is not accepted by the police officer in charge though, as he refuses to produce a report on the peoples' complaints without having co-ordinated with the departments involved beforehand. The 12 villagers who are accompanied by the NGOs YSN, Walhi and PMII then demand to deliver their report directly to the head of the police, but are told that the boss can't be disturbed. Finally they only deliver a letter addressed to him via the relations desk.
- The newspaper Komentor, page Minut, cites the public relations officer of the regency, Ir. Ronny Siwi, that the Department of Environment Jakarta has already decided for a tailing storage facility on land to be granted to MSM.
This is an obvious lie, as the Minister, Mr. Rahmat Witoelar, during the audience granted to AMMALTA on October 16th assured the delegation that there was not yet a decision regarding the EIA of MSM.

Thursday, November 16th 2006

- The newspaper Swara Kita cites the public relations officer of the provincial police, Benny Bella, that two people he names as Lexi and Roy Kereh are the brains behind the attack on the post and will be charged accordingly. He violates the principle that a person is not guilty as long as the guilt is not proven.

Friday, November 17th 2006

- Lexy and Roy Kereh sign a letter of entitling their lawyer to defend them. The process of arresting and criminal charge is protested on grounds of violation of human rights.
- Lexy Kereh (23 years old), villager of Rinondoran who since November 13th is held at the district police office Likupang is moved to the regency's police quarters in Airmadidi.

Compiled by:
Yayasan Suara Nurani and AMMALTA North
Sulawesi
According to what really happened