

On mining waste

15 Desember 2005
The Jakarta Post
English
(c) 2005 The Jakarta Post

Statements by PT **Meares Sopotan** Mining (The Jakarta Post , Dec. 8) about its Toka Tindung operations deserve further comment.

This gold mine plans to dump some six to eight million tonnes of mining waste into the pristine waters of Rinondoran Bay in North Sulawesi. The process of gold extraction will use cyanide heap leaching. It is nonsense for PT MSM to say that these tailings will be "similar in character to sediments on the sea bed".

These wastes, containing cyanide compounds plus arsenic and heavy metals, will not stay on the sea bed as an inert heap. There is a high risk they will enter the food chain. Seas around North Sulawesi are subject to tropical storms and strong currents; frequent earth tremors affect the ocean floor.

It is also misleading for **Meares Sopotan** Mining to state that the tailings "will comply with Indonesian and international standards". The company's own report shows that the mine tailings will contain 23 micrograms/liter dissolved copper -- three times the new Marine Water Criteria for the ASEAN region.

Indonesia does not possess marine sediment quality guidelines, but the tailings will exceed American NOAA Guidelines for chromium and manganese. In other words, this mine would not be allowed in other countries because it could not meet water quality criteria.

Meares Sopotan Mining, owned by the British-registered company Archipelago Resources, has already begun to construct a harbor at Rinondoran, even though it has no license for the disposal of toxic wastes. Its Environmental Impact Assessment is not valid as it was carried out over seven years ago to fulfill the basic minimum requirements and there was no public consultation. Armed police from the local Police Mobile Brigade (Brimob) units are being paid to protect this development of a public beach.

More than 10,000 local people have signed a petition to stop the mine. They fear they will suffer the same fate as the Buyat community where Newmont dumped its mining waste. They want to decide their own future, not to be the objects of "socialization" and "community development projects" determined by the company. They want sustainable livelihoods, not the promise of five years of wealth from a gold mine followed by a legacy of irreparably damaged land and poisoned waters. They want to develop their fishing, agriculture and tourism potential.

The **Meares Sopotan** Mining concession overlaps the Tangkoko-Dua Saudara National Park with its dense tropical forests and unique wildlife. I have been lucky enough to go there -- it is a beautiful and special place. Local people have set up eco-tourism ventures dependent on the extraordinary variety of marine life.

Foreign and Indonesian-owned mining companies should behave more responsibly to communities and their environments. Indonesia has signed international conventions on biodiversity protection; economic, social and cultural rights; and civil and political rights. The government should fulfil its responsibilities under these agreements and respect the wishes of the local communities by stopping **Meares Soputan** Mining's Toka Tindung activities now and refusing to issue permits for sub-sea tailings disposal throughout Indonesia.

FRANCES CARR , Down to Earth, London