EU?s Raw Materials Policy

Title My Alyansa Tigil Mina (ATM) colleagues were in Brussels for the 8th Asia-Europe Peoples Forum (AEPF) this week. The AEPF is an interregional network of progressive civil society organizations across Asia and Europe. It emerged in the 1996 from a common desire and need among organizations across the two continents to open up new venues for dialogue, cooperation and solidarity. It has assumed the unique function of fostering people?s solidarity across the two regions and has become a vehicle for advancing people?s voices within Asia-Europe relations. AEPF engages the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) events both directly and indirectly through debates, policy proposals, lobbying and creative actions. During that forum, the international working group on indigenous peoples, extractives and climate change hit the EU policy on accessing raw materials. They claimed that the policy, the Raw Materials Initiative which is embedded in the Global Europe Strategy, was impacting on the lives and livelihoods of indigenous peoples (IPs) in developing countries, such as the Philippines and Indonesia, and effectively making them poorer. The EU Raw Materials Initiative is an aggressive policy paper of the EU Commission on Trade. It defends European corporate interests to get access to international resources at cheap prices, to ensure European growth and jobs. The policy clearly called for ?undistorted access of European companies to raw materials.? The groups claim that this policy fails to address important issues like climate justice, rights of IPs and sustainable development. Civil society organizations asserted that the aggressive push of Europe to ensure access to raw materials such as minerals and fossil fuels continue to impact on IPs who live in ancestral lands that are rich sources of minerals and coal. They cited the case of Borneo in Indonesia, where the coal mines are extracting 200 million tons every year. At least 10 percent of this coal is exported to Europe. Resulting in the dislocation of more than a hundred thousand Dayak people and local communities in the island, activists raised problems rooted from the mining operations including destruction of watershed areas, restrictions to access to lands, human rights abuses and health problems. Siti Maemunah of Jaringan Advokasi Tambang, a national campaign group in Indonesia described coal mine operations ?not only as dirty, but deadly as well.? She said that ?Europe must take a leadership role in changing the consumption patterns and lifestyle of the Global North, so that demands for minerals and coals from developing countries like Indonesia will be reduced.? Judy Pasimio of Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center/Friends of the Earth Philippines (LRC-FOE), based in Manila, described the EU policy as disturbing particularly for the indigenous communities who face the devastating impacts of mining and other extractive industries. Not only is it disturbing, but irresponsible as well. ?EU?s raw materials policy should be informed by the undistorted reality of the IP?s landlessness, hunger, vulnerability to disasters and being victims of human rights abuses,? she concluded. Meanwhile, German group Philippinenbuero asserted that there is inconsistency when EU provides development aid for IPs on one hand, and yet fails to raise standards among extractive industries regarding corporate accountability and deliver its commitments to pursue climate justice. Michael Reckordt, executive director of Philippinenbuero said that ?instead of claiming a better access for the European industry to

raw materials and pushing investor-friendly conditions, the EU should struggle for more transparency in investments into the mining and extractives sector. He also floated the proposal to make companies accountable thru legally-binding mechanisms, in instances where extraction activities violate human rights and introduce environmental destruction in Asia and around the world. Mario Maderazo from the Philippine Misereor Partnership Anti-Mining Campaign in the Philippines stated that the EU Raw Materials policy will only strengthen the grip of corporate interest over access to natural resources in developing countries like the Philippines and put the IPs at the losing end of the deal. He argued that the EU must instead, push for a natural resources policy that will strengthen the property rights of indigenous peoples over their lands and resources. Similarly, the group chided the EU for pushing the Raw Materials Initiative, as this policy will potentially worsen climate change. They said that the high demand for fossil fuel such as coal will continue to make high greenhouse gas emissions and deforestation resulting from mining will drastically reduce carbon sinks in Asia. ?We are practically burning our future with these policy options,? said Kris Vanslambrouck, campaigner from 11.11.11. The groups also demanded that EU policy must clearly move towards greater corporate accountability, especially in industries such as extractives that pose potentially serious negative impacts to affected communities. They asserted that a genuine corporate accountability includes a framework of placing the burden on corporations of proving that any access to natural resources of host countries will not cost negative environmental and social impacts. by Anabelle Plantilla Image credit: Rich Lindie; www.theworldsrarest.com