

Australian-Canadian Mining Company OceanaGold Misleads Public on Philippines Mine

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*Spokesperson for the Australian National Campaign on Mining in the Philippines (ANCoMP) **Andrew Morrison** believes that Australian-Canadian mining company OceanaGold is misleading the public about its mine in Didipio in Central Luzon.*

The Philippine government said it would renew the company’s right to mine in Didipio last December. OceanaGold said that proved it was “a responsible multinational miner” and that it had the strong endorsement of residents in local communities in and around the mine, including Indigenous people.

In fact, the mine is strongly opposed by local communities and Indigenous people, Morrison said on April 16, because “OceanaGold has been found to have committed serious human rights violations”.

OceanaGold started mining in Didipio in 2013, despite opposition from local government and the community.

“The company secured mining rights under a Financial and Technical Assistance Agreement (FTAA), which required it to reach agreement with landholders for access to their land. But it failed to reach agreement with all relevant Didipio landholders and, allegedly, tried to circumvent consent processes. It also committed human rights abuses to forcefully acquire the land,” Morrison said.

“When OceanaGold’s FTAA expired in June 2019, community groups and local and provincial governments took action, including a legally sanctioned barricade, forcing OceanaGold to suspend its operations.”

A 2007 report by Oxfam Australia’s mining ombudsman reported allegations that OceanaGold had benefited from the forceful acquisition of the Didipio land. The Philippine Commission on Human Rights 2011 report found that OceanaGold had violated human rights by illegally demolishing at least 187 houses in Didipio, without a court order and without relocating those without shelter.

OceanaGold's private security force also used violence against community members. The commission also found that the company had erected fences and checkpoints on roads used by locals, as well as using firearms to intimidate them. Residents were beaten and one was shot by OceanaGold security personnel.

The report noted that OceanaGold "is largely responsible for the continuing threats to security of persons, given it controls and supervises the actions of its security forces, and that unlawful demolitions were conducted at its behest".

Morrison said other human rights abuses associated with the mine include the violent dispersal of protesters in 2009 and 2020. The UN High Commission for Human Rights is concerned. It said that last year around 100 police forcibly dispersed some 30 indigenous and environment defenders who were exercising their right to freedom of assembly to object to the continued operations in the Didipio mine, adding that the police used "unnecessary and disproportionate force".

"The community and local government in Didipio oppose OceanaGold's mine because of its alleged devastating effects on their health, livelihoods and the environment," Morrison said. "Residents have complained about noise, air and water pollution that have affected income from agriculture, and caused serious health problems including an increase in respiratory complaints and skin diseases.

"Reports by Advocates of Science and Technology for the People, Philippines and Kalikasan found that river waters are now unsafe for agriculture, irrigation and human consumption and this has led to reduced yields from irrigated crops, reduced fish stocks and a high incidence of plant and animal diseases.

Losing access to land leaves the community with severely reduced agricultural income and limited the ability of residents to grow their own rice.

"It is clear that communities in and around Didipio have long opposed OceanaGold's mine, and that they continue to oppose it. It is also clear that OceanaGold has ignored community opposition and, instead of engaging broadly with the community, has committed serious human rights violations," Morrison said.

"ANCoMP is concerned that OceanaGold's misleading statements are being used to push for the renewal of their licence to once again force its unwanted mine on the people of Didipio. We are also concerned that OceanaGold is misleading the market, their shareholders and the Australian public."

ANCoMP is calling on OceanaGold to correct their misleading statements, and withdraw its renewal application. It is also calling on the Australian government and regulatory authorities to investigate OceanaGold and take appropriate action to ensure it is meeting corporate social responsibility standards.

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Featured image: OceanaGold's mine at Didipio. Photo: @OceanaGold via Twitter

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