

Armenian Government Ignores Concerns Raised by 14 Organizations about Teghut Mine

PRESS RELEASE
December 19, 2012

The Armenia Copper Programme (ACP), a division of the Vallex Group registered offshore in Liechtenstein, has begun operating a controversial mining project initiated in 2007 in the northern village of Teghut, Armenia. Preliminary work on the project began with the clearing of a portion of the pristine Teghut Forest to create a massive tailing dump for the toxic waste left after mineral processing. Currently, the company is aggressively removing a mountain in order to reach the underground deposits of copper and molybdenum.

The Republic of Armenia has openly made mining a key part of its economic development strategy for the country, despite widespread public protest on environmental, economic, and social grounds. There are more than 400 active mines and 19 tailing dumps in Armenia, a small country the size of the US state of Maryland. Scientists have reported major health risks in communities around the mines scattered throughout Armenia. Human rights and environmental activists have also protested violations of property rights and the loss of rare and endangered ecosystems and biodiversity.



A coalition of 14 prominent organizations including Armenia Tree Project (ATP) and Armenian Environmental Network (AEN) sent a letter to President Serzh Sargsyan and Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan on October 30, requesting an independent Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the Teghut mining project.

“Cases brought in opposition to the operations in Armenian courts have been cursorily and improperly dismissed on strictly procedural bases without proper examination as to the substance of the claims. The Environmental Impact Assessment and public notice requirements are fatally flawed. The irreparable damage already done to Teghut, and the yet greater damage that will be done to the region if mining continues, demand immediate attention,” reads the letter, in part.

The joint letter requests the EIA in order to: 1) comply with domestic and international laws, 2) determine and present an accurate analysis of the environmental impact of the Teghut mining operations, 3) address the potential public health impacts of the Teghut mining operations, 4) take alternative development options to mining into consideration, and 5) restore public faith and trust in government. For the full text of the letter, go to: <http://tinyurl.com/teghut-eia>

The coalition recently received a response to the letter from Edgar Pirumyan, Ministry of Nature Protection Chief of Staff, who said that an EIA was completed within the scope of the law and that the project was therefore approved. For the full text of the reply, go to: <http://tinyurl.com/mnp-reply>

“We are disappointed with the perfunctory response through the Ministry of Nature Protection whose primary mission is the protection of Armenia’s environment. While an environmental assessment was conducted for the Teghut mining project, the organization conducting it, LMI, is a subsidiary of Vallex, which is the project sponsor. By international standards, the LMI assessment certainly cannot be considered an ‘independent’ environmental assessment,” notes ATP Managing Director Tom Garabedian.

“We restate our request that a valid independent environmental impact assessment be conducted before any further work at the Teghut site is undertaken. We are heartened by the public scrutiny which the Teghut project has received and support the efforts of the activists who are petitioning the Armenian government. In a recent visit to California, the Prime Minister expressed his commitment to Armenia’s environment. We hope that there is a willingness of the government to reexamine Teghut and mining in Armenia as a whole,” concludes Garabedian.

“The Teghut issue resonates with Armenians near and far because it weaves together a number of contemporary issues: rule of law; transparency in decision-making; public health considerations; and public access to information,” says Ursula Kazarian, President of AEN. She continues, “The unrelenting pillaging of precious and limited natural resources for the short-term financial benefit of a handful of foreign and Armenian investors is both tragic and appalling. Despite the government’s lackluster response to our request for an independent EIA, we are encouraged by the increasing civic engagement we are seeing on the ground and in the Diaspora around this issue, and we hope to see that momentum continue.”

The letter was co-signed by Acopian Center for the Environment, Armenian American Health Professionals Organization, Armenian American Medical Association, Armenian American Nurses Association, Armenian American Pharmacists Association, Armenian Bar Association, Armenian International Dental Association, Armenian Medical International Committee, Axis of Justice (Serj Tankian), Civic Forum, haikProject, and World Wide Fund for Nature, Armenia.

####

AEN’s mission is to increase information and engagement among Armenians, in Armenia and in the Diaspora, and the wider conservation community about environmental issues in Armenia, while facilitating environmentally sustainable development in Armenia through responsible partnerships of Diasporan and international resources. Please visit the website www.armenia-environment.org.

ATP’s mission is to assist the Armenian people in using trees to improve their standard of living and protect the environment, guided by the desire to promote self-sufficiency, aid those with the fewest resources first, and conserve the indigenous ecosystem. ATP’s three major programs are tree planting, environmental education, and sustainable development initiatives. For more information, please visit the website www.armeniatree.org.