

United States
P.O. Box 56336
Washington, D.C. 20040



Armenia
11/5 Proshyan Str.
Yerevan 0019 RA

TEGHUT MINE IN ARMENIA – AN ECOLOGICAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS DISASTER

BACKGROUND

The village of Teghut is located in Lori province, in northern Armenia. Teghut and its neighboring village, Shnogh, have a combined population of approximately 3600 people and the villagers have traditionally been farmers and cultivators of forest products. The Teghut forest is adjacent to these villages and represents one of Armenia's few remaining preserved forest areas. It is in this forest that the Vallex Group's subsidiary, the Armenian Copper Programme (ACP), has begun the process of establishing a mine to extract copper and molybdenum.



Photo by Vardan H. (Save Teghut! Facebook page)

ACP was granted a license for exploitation in 2001, and an Environmental Impact Assessment was conducted in 2004 by Lernametalurgiai Institut cjsc (LMI), which is owned by Vallex Group. Economic evaluations conducted by LMI were grossly undervalued and, in some cases, inaccurately compiled. International as well as local experts have challenged the project citing environmental, legal and human safety concerns. To date, these concerns have not been addressed and the public has not been adequately consulted on the project. Additionally, no independent and comprehensive field assessments have been conducted.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND HUMAN HEALTH ISSUES

According to the World Bank, Armenia is in danger of losing all of its forests in the next 20-30 years. Forests in Armenia have shrunk from 20% to 7% in the previous twenty years. The allocated land for the Teghut mining operation is 3,684 acres -- 82% (or 3,044 acres) of which is covered with forests. Teghut forest is home to 6 species of flora and 29 species of fauna listed as endangered in the Red Book of Armenia. The project plans clear-cutting nearly 900 acres of old growth, virgin forest. As a result of resource extraction, one of the forested mountains will be replaced by a 600-meter deep pit.

Dumping tails will be disposed in the gorge of Duqanadzor River. Exploitation of the mine will produce about 500 million tons of tailings and 600 million tons of various other wastes. Further, tailings containing lead, arsenic, zinc, sulfurous compounds

and much more would be dumped into the Shnogh and the Debed rivers, making them unfit for drinking, irrigation or plant and animal life. The Debed River flows into Georgia therefore water pollution from mining activities would also be a transnational problem.

A recent written declaration, signed by 44 members of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly ("PACE"), referred to the mining project as a "man-made ecological disaster" and asserted that the Armenian Government violated its international obligations and Armenian legislation by forcefully taking the lands of the community against their will for mining purposes.

LEGAL CONCERNS

International agreements which have been violated include, but are not limited to: UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, UN Convention on Biodiversity, UN Convention on Combating Desertification, UN Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention), UNESCO World Heritage Convention, European Landscape Convention, UN Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention).

National laws of the Republic of Armenia which have been violated include, but are not limited to: RA Land Code [Article 48], RA Constitution [Articles 5,11, &33.2], RA Law on Flora [Article 17], RA Law on Fauna [Article 18], RA Law on Administration Principles and Administrative Proceeding [Article 62], RA Law on Environmental Impact Assessment [Articles 11 & 14].

GROWING CIVIL ACTIVISM

There has been increasing opposition to the Teghut mining operation forming in Armenia as well as in the Armenian Diaspora in the U.S., and particularly in Washington, D.C.; Boston, MA; and in Southern California. Protests and rallies, as well as panels and social media, have been utilized to promote opposition and to garner both local and international support.

It is anticipated that the Teghut issue may become a hot political issue over the next year, given the implications of corruption and blatant violations of the rule of law. The Presidential election will take place in 2013 and Teghut is quickly becoming one of the top political topics to track.