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Church spearheads campaign to stop 2 nickel mines in Palawan

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BROOKE'S POINT, Palawan, Philippines -- The local Roman Catholic Church has thrown its weight behind a campaign to oppose two large-scale nickel mining projects currently applying for a mineral production sharing agreement (MPSA) with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Palawan Bishop Pedro Arigo spearheaded a rally Thursday attended by over 1,000 supporters and parishioners in the village of Ipilan here in what was apparently a start to the campaign to block the two projects currently in the exploration phase.

Two mining companies, Ipilan Nickel Mining Corp. and MacroAsia Corp., are seeking to upgrade their respective MPSA exploration permits to an operation permit and are required by law to seek an endorsement from the local government unit.

Ipilan Nickel is a subsidiary of Toledo Mining and Development Corp. and a sister company of Berong Nickel Corp., which is already operating a nickel mine under an MPSA in the village of Berong, Quezon, southern Palawan.

MacroAsia is a company of business tycoon Lucio Tan that has ventured into mining.

During the rally, Brooke's Point Vice Mayor Jean Feliciano led the petition signing of local residents to oppose the nickel mining projects.

"Brooke's Point has learned the lesson from the other towns in southern Palawan that had been ravaged by mining and we will never let it happen," Feliciano said.

She added that Brooke's Point "as it is, is one of the most progressive towns in the south because of our agriculture."

Ipilan village chairman Jonathan Lagrada, a local anti-mining activist, said they were seeking the revocation of a village endorsement issued by the previous village council in 2007, a month before their term ended.

"We want the DENR to respect the real sentiment of the people of Ipilan, that we are against this project because of its effects on our agricultural lands. The endorsement given to the mining companies by the previous barangay council is questionable because it was a midnight resolution and did not even go through council deliberation," Lagrada explained in Filipino.

Puerto Princesa City Mayor Edward Hagedorn and Arigo have both expressed support to the campaign launched by anti-mining advocates in Brooke's Point.

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