



12 July 2010

His Excellency

**BENIGNO SIMEON C. AQUINO, III**

President of the Republic of the Philippines

New Executive Building, Malacañang Palace Compound

J. P. Laurel St., San Miguel, Manila

Your Excellency,

We, the Catholic Bishops of the Philippines, join the whole nation in greeting you and welcoming you as the new and duly elected president of our country. Together with others, we are hopeful that your presidency will usher in needed changes in our country. We are especially happy that you have declared it as your policy to listen to the people. As bishops in dioceses all over the country, we are privy to many things that happen among our people, especially among the poor and the voiceless.

Emboldened by your openness, we appeal to you to protect and conserve our natural resources. For more than a decade now, we are asking our government to put a stop to large-scale mining since this not only permanently damages the delicate balance of our natural environment, but it also makes our small farmers, fisher folks and indigenous peoples suffer.

We question the neo-liberal pitch that there is no other path to development except through further economic liberalization, especially in the mining industry. The CBCP calls for *changing the way we manage and develop our natural resources*. Our bias for the use of our resources should be for Filipinos and not for foreigners. We are calling for the abrogation of the Mining Act of 1995 that do not adequately protect the interest of our people and the country's natural resources.

As if the Mining Law of 1995 is not bad enough, it has been made more harmful by EO 270-A, better known as the National Policy Agenda on Revitalizing Mining in the Philippines, decreed by former President Macapagal-Arroyo in 2004. It is within your capacity, Mr. President, to revoke this executive order to give a strong signal to our people that now you have the genuine good of the Filipinos at heart.

Furthermore, we call for *review of all anomalous and controversial mining contracts*. We cannot move forward if we fail to rectify previous contentious contracts the state has entered into with mining investors. Connected with this is the request to *make public all*

*existing mining applications and contracts.* The people and NGOs are not able to scrutinize the applications and contracts because these are kept from the public. We are expecting this new government to turn away from the policy of secrecy that characterized the previous administration. The best instruments we could use in safeguarding the interests of our nation are transparency and sincerity in heeding the voice of the people who are the true beneficiaries and stakeholders of the country's resources. The promotion of participatory governance guarantees check and balance on government decisions and policies. You have clearly declared that as public servants, you and your colleagues in the government are ultimately accountable to the people.

Pursuant to the continuing effort of the DENR to revitalize its environmental conservation and protection strategies, we also ask your commitment to spearhead the *reform in DENR bureaucracy and weed the corrupt officials* in its national and local agencies. In light of bureaucratic reform, we would like to highlight **the principle of subsidiarity**. We have many experiences of local governments refusing the entry of mining and even passing a moratorium on mining operations, but only end up not being recognized at the national level. Similarly, we also ask that an appropriate disciplinary measure be imposed upon local DENR officials who try to suppress the legitimate objections of the stakeholders by preventing their complaints from reaching the attention of the national office.

We deeply appreciate your commitment towards accountability and transparency, the hallmarks of your government's platform. We pray that the same level of commitment would reverberate to your office's pursuit for environmental justice.

With my paternal blessing and cordial regards.

In Christ,



+NERIO ODCHIMAR, D.D.

Bishop of Tandag

President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP)