



CALL FOR ACTION ON MINING IN MONGOLIA

BY RECOGNIZING the importance of the Mongolian mining sector, which constitutes over 8.6 percent of GDP and 56.0 percent of total exports and substantially contributes to national development;

BY RECOGNIZING the contribution of the mining sector to the local economy in generating short and medium term employment opportunities for local communities;

WE EXPRESS OUR CONCERN over the increasing impact of mining on the environment and the quality of life for the people of Mongolia. Current mining practices have large impacts on the ecology of rivers.

Placer mining, the most numerous method of extracting gold deposits, has greatly increased river pollution through increased loading of sediment particles and nutrients. This loading causes changes in the composition of fish species within the river and of invertebrates that the endangered fish species that rely on for food sources. Officially, 28 river basins in 8 Aimags are “heavily polluted” and some parts of the rivers are “damaged irreversibly”.

Recently, there has also been a rapid increase in hard rock gold mining practices, which use chemicals such as cyanide or mercury. Lessons learned from other parts of the world indicate that, if hard rock mining is conducted improperly and dam failures occur, they cause chemical spills and the river ecosystem and surrounding environment may be irreversibly damaged. Critically, these chemical spills may result in a complete loss of biodiversity within the immediate river ecosystems and may also significantly impact species from surrounding areas that rely on the affected ecosystem, including animals, plants and humans. It has been shown that the impacts of such chemicals spills are long term, as chemicals such as mercury and cyanide are persistent toxins that remain in the environment for a long period of time. Moreover, when humans come into direct contact with mercury, they may suffer severe psychological problems.

In addition to the serious pollution caused by mining activities, water extraction and morphological changes of rivers associated with these activities are also causing severe environmental problems. For example, flush mining for gold causes the drying of several small rivers and the siltation of downstream waters. Further, in some arid areas, water extraction for mining activities causes severe shortages in water available to local people and livestock for drinking.

During the last decade, gold has been exploited in easy accessible areas. However, recently, mining activities have expanded into pristine areas and even into protected areas. Critically, despite the fact that these protected areas are unique and offer invaluable opportunities for environmental protection and biodiversity conservation, there still remains growing pressure to de-gazette many of these areas.

WE EXPRESS OUR CONCERN over the current process and procedure for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), as a potential mitigation tool to prevent the impacts of mining projects. Currently, the entire EIA process and procedure including decision-making, contract awarding, quality of EIA findings, and enforcement of EIA findings is inadequate. Mining development will continue to be unbalanced and unsustainable unless these EIA processes and procedures are amended to be clear, transparent, and accountable to public scrutiny; and accompanied with strong compliance and enforcement provisions.

THEREFORE:

WE ARE CALLING ON DECISION-MAKERS TO:

- Amend the Mongolian Law on EIA, to provide a clear and transparent process and procedure for conducting EIAs with effective public participation in the decision-making process, open access to EIA documents, and public monitoring and audits of EIA compliance;
- Support the introduction of more environmentally sound and sustainable techniques and technologies through the provision of tax exemptions and credits for mining sector investors; and
- Ensure that all current environmental laws, regulations and standards are strongly and effectively enforced.

WE ARE CALLING ON INVESTORS IN MINING SECTOR TO:

- Comply with the process and procedures of all current environmental laws, regulations and standards;
- Ensure that your Mining Operation process and procedures meet international standards of best environmental practices; and
- Respect and understand the value of Mongolia's unique protected areas and pristine areas, which constitutes the common heritage of the current and future generations.

WWF Mongolia Programme Office
TCF – Taimen Conservation Fund
UMENGO-Union of Mongolian Environmental NGOs
WCS – Wildlife Conservation Society
ITG – International Takhi Group

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