



**TEGHUT
DEFENSE
GROUP**



**International Conference on the Environmental Safety
of Teghut Copper-Molybdenum Mining Project**

SUMMARY

**December 14, 2010
Yerevan, Armenia**

An international conference on the Environmental Safety of Teghut Copper-Molybdenum Mining project took place on December 14, 2010 in Yerevan. The conference was preceded with a site visit to Teghut to introduce the participants with the ongoing activities on the mine and the area to be affected by the project.

The conference was organized by Teghut Defense Group, a civic initiative in Armenia, and Green Alternative NGO in Georgia. It aimed at revealing and discussing the concerns of experts and non-governmental organizations related to the safety of operation of Teghut mine, situated in the watershed of transboundary Debed River in an area prone to earthquakes and landslides.

A total of about 120 organizations - Armenian and Georgian government authorities, international organizations, mining companies, financial institutions, NGOs, mass media – as well as independent experts were invited to the international conference. Armenian and Georgian national focal points of respective UNECE conventions were also invited to the conference to present their views in regard with likely violations of international obligations. Among the invitees was also the Prime Minister of Armenia, who particularly was requested to update on the implementation of his instructions given to some ministries at the meeting with Teghut Defense Group in 2008.

About 90 participants attended the conference. Only 3 of those came from the invited 33 state structures in Armenia and Georgia – representing RA Ministry of Agriculture, RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs and RA Ministry of Health. Representatives of other institutions, including RA Prime-minister, RA Ministry of Nature Protection as well as the focal points of relevant international conventions were not present. The organizers of the conference regarded this fact as evasion of responsibility in respect with operation of Teghut mine.

In her opening speech Sona Ayvazyan, representative of Teghut Defense Group, introduced the main concerns regarding mine's operation and, particularly, the matters related to the environmental safety. She briefly presented the developments in regard with this issue, such as legal violations in the decision-making process, civic struggle, legal disputes, appeals to international structures, etc.

Varsham Avetyan, PhD in History, Professor of Country Studies and An Honorary Citizen of Shnogh village - one of the communities affected by the mine, presented alternative possibilities for more expedient development of Teghut and Shnogh communities as well as the negative impacts of the mine both on the environment and livelihood of rural communities.

Gagik Arzumanyan, Executive Director of Armenian Copper Program (ACP) CJSC, the company exploiting Teghut mine, presented the program of mine's exploitation and the ongoing works. Without denying the inevitability of the negative environmental impact of mine operation, he stressed the positive socio-economic impact, particularly creation of new jobs, improvement of the social-economic situation of villagers and

prevention of migration. He also highlighted activities that ACP undertakes and plans to carry on to make the mine to comply with modern high standards. He mentioned about the organization of work through a closed water cycle, activities aimed at ensuring the safety of the dumping tail as well as reforestation efforts intending to plant twice as much area as the amount of the clear-cut forest.

Armenian experts, Hakob Sanasaryan, PhD in Chemistry, Chairman of the Greens' Union of Armenia, Knarik Hovhannisyan, PhD in Technical Sciences, Expert of Water Systems Ecology and Edita Vardgesyan, economist, presented their opinion and concerns about the fact that the negative impacts resulted from the mine's operation will exceed the positive impact for several times. They especially emphasized the fact that the state environmental review conclusion provided by the RA Ministry of Nature Protection was not trustworthy as simply recapped the environmental impact assessment (EIA) document developed upon the order of ACP and ignored the miscalculations and inaccuracies appeared in that document. It is worth noting that the mine's exploitation is planned for 50-70 years, whereas the EIA was prepared only for the first phase - 8 years` underestimating and/or ignoring the long-term impact.

According to Armenian independent experts, mine's exploitation will inevitably lead to soil, water and air contamination, loss of biodiversity and destruction of the ecosystem as a whole. Massive logging will increase the risks of landslides and floods and the newly planted trees will undertake the "forest" function no earlier than after 30 years. Thus, reforestation activities implemented by the mining company cannot replace the existing forests, which are fully formulated ecosystems.

According to experts, the greatest threat comes from the tailing dump, which will be the largest one in the whole region and will contain millions of tons of toxic waste. The hazardous nature of the tailings lasts for thousands of years. Given this, the negative impact of the mining projects shall be assessed not only for the first phase of mine's exploitation or even the whole period of mine operation, but also for the period after the mine is closed. Despite the measures taken by ACP, there is no construction that can ensure absolute isolation of the toxic substances for thousands of years. Any tailing leakage may pose enormous danger not only for Armenia, but also for neighboring Georgia, as the toxic substances will infiltrate the rivers, including transboundary Debed. The most dangerous is the risk of contamination of underground water, which will be impossible to clean or control. Besides, the experts expressed their concerns with the fact that the dumping tail will drain over time and its upper layer will disperse in the air by the wind in a form of dust.

The Armenian experts also criticized the EIA document showing immense underestimations of impacts of the mining project on certain components of the environment, complete disregard of a few impacts and the resulting artificial diminution of project costs. They highlighted the importance of independent international expert assessment, which was proposed by NGOs still in 2008 at the meeting with the RA Prime Minister, but was not endorsed by RA Government.

Georgian NGOs and journalists expressed their concerns related to water contamination and transboundary impacts of the project. Manana Kochladze, president of Green Alternative NGO pointed out to the lack of risk assessment and management of emergency situations in EIA. Georgian NGOs were also worried by the fact that they had approached the Armenian Embassy in Georgia with a request to ensure access to respective documents in Russian or in English, but did not receive those and, thus, could not conduct their own assessment of likely impacts. M.Kochladze also mentioned that Georgian authorities do not demonstrate a responsible performance in this respect either and do not follow-up with the anxieties indicated by NGOs. ACP representative expressed their readiness to provide documents in Russian and/or English.

Amongst the representatives of state institutions the only person who spoke at the event was the representative of RA Ministry of Health. He particularly stated that Teghut mining project has been concurred with the Ministry of Health and no significant potential risks on health were revealed.

Representatives of NGOs, international organizations, experts who spoke during the Q&A and discussion session continuously reiterated that Teghut project is not well justified, while its negative impacts are so immense that safe implementation of the project is practically impossible even in the case of the use of best technologies. In the long-run, it will be absolutely impossible to use the area of the mine and the adjacent

