

July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023

### **Updates and Appeal**

We are pleased to announce the first victory of the KhonRakBanKerdGroup (The people who love their hometown) in Dan Khun Thot in the ongoing efforts to protect the rights of women, mothers, and human rights defenders (HRDs). They **managed to get the Governor to stop temporarily the potash mining activities, etc until possible complete suspension of the mining project in the near future.**

The KhonRak BanKerd Dan Khun Thot is a group formed by mothers and villagers who have been adversely affected by the potash mining project of Thai Cali Co., Ltd. under government concession number 28831/16137. This project has had a significant impact on the Nong Sai Subdistrict, Nong Bua Takiat Subdistrict, and Non Mueang Phatthana Subdistrict in Dan Khun Thot District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province.

Over and above the potash mining, a refined salt factory also began operation by the same company in the project area, further exacerbating the detrimental effects to the environment.

The soil has become saline and thus unsuitable for farming, while the water in the region has also turned saline, rendering this water unusable for agricultural purposes. The community has seen dead fish and rotting houses.

The potash mining operations have severely affected the soil-water environment, making it even saltier than the ocean and thus unsuitable for cultivation. Consequently, the villagers have been forced to purchase clean usable water at exorbitant prices because they no longer can use the water from well or river in the affected area.

### **June 26 - "Stop Don Nong Pho Potash, Restore Nong Sai Community" Protest and Action at City Hall**

On June 26, more than 200 human rights defenders from the KhonRakBanKerd Dan Khun Thot Community gathered at the Nakhon Ratchasima Province City Hall for a rally and action called "Stop Don Nong Pho Potash, Restore Nong Sai Community." They urged government agencies to address the problems faced by the human rights defenders affected by Taikali Co., Ltd.'s potash mining operations, who had been operating with government permission from 2015 to 2040. The mining activities cover an area of over 9,000 rai and have had severe environmental and socio-economic impacts on the affected persons from the regions, including Nong Sai Subdistrict, Nong Bua Takiat Subdistrict, and Non Mueang Phatthana Subdistrict.

The Network of People Who Own Mineral Resources (a national anti-mining peoples' network comprised of 20 communities around Thailand) also conducted a sample survey of the individuals affected by the potash mining. The survey, completed by 71 community members, revealed that the damage to agricultural areas amounted to 9,252,213 baht, the damage to property totalled 4,674,471 baht, and the overall damage amounted to 13,926,684 baht.

In their pursuit of a resolution to the problem, the KhonRakBanKerd Dan Khun Thot group requested a meeting with Mr. Sayam Sirimongkol, the Governor of Nakhon Ratchasima Province. They sought a definite resolution to the problems faced by the villagers. They stated that if a satisfactory solution was not provided, they would stage an overnight sit-in at the City Hall beginning on June 26.

Mr. Somkiat Wiriyakulanan, the Deputy Governor of Nakhon Ratchasima Province, arrived at 11 am to meet with the women and human rights defenders. He exhibited a dismissive attitude towards the people. He insinuated that the human rights defenders were organized by outsiders who were not directly impacted by the mining operations. This narrative was similar to the mining company's propaganda used against the community. This led to tensions between the Deputy Governor and the KhonRakBanKerd Dan Khon Thot group. As a result, the group decided not to further negotiate with the Deputy Governor.

Then, at 4:00 p.m., a negotiation began with the participation of Mr. Samart Suwanmanee, the Permanent Secretary of Nakhon Ratchasima Province, and also one Arthit Chamkhunthod, the director of the Damrongdhamma Center in Nakhon Ratchasima Province, who facilitated the negotiation process with the human rights defenders. Representatives from the affected communities took turns presenting information to the Permanent Secretary, highlighting the deviations from the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) guidelines in the project layout.

During the negotiations, the community highlighted, amongst others, that the provincial industry had failed to provide information to the affected villagers regarding saline water seepage into the land and water sources, the emergence of saltwater in farming areas and areas around villagers' homes, and that the damage of the houses was due to effects of mining.

The failure of the Established Working Group's to inform the villagers about the results of soil examinations and water contamination checks was also raised. Additionally, when the villagers requested inspections of the mine, they were informed that the officials lacked the authority to conduct such inspections, despite the fact that government officials do have the authority to do so under the existing mineral laws.

The Governor of Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Mr. Siam Sirimongkol, finally arrives at 6.30pm. After negotiation with the HRDs, it was **agreed that the Governor shall immediately order the suspension of the potash mining business, salt factory, and exploration drilling. The mining plan in the area shall be temporarily amended. Within the next week, the Governor will visit the area, meet with the human rights defenders, and gather sufficient evidence to present to the Ministry of Industry in order to suspend the entire project. The estimated time frame was 7-10 days.**

The KhonRakBanKerd Dan Khon Thot Group expressed satisfaction with the results and returned to their community around 10 p.m. However, the struggles of the local villagers will continue until the potash mining operations in the area are completely halted.

On Protection International's and the affected community's request, the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand did send a team to observe the negotiation. The Office of UNOHCHR (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights) had also been monitoring the situation.

The dedicated efforts of rural mothers, caregivers, and women human rights defenders who champion the rights of their communities are commendable. They strive for inclusion in public consultations and

decision-making processes, highlighting the significance of issues such as land occupancy management, the impact of business on human rights, and the well-being of the collective.

We strongly urge you to continue to closely monitor the situation and address the security threats faced by the women and human rights defenders from the KhonRakBanKerd DanKhon Thot groups, as well as groups like the Network Of People Who Own Mineral Resources and The Campaign For Public Policy On Mineral Resources ( PPM). It is crucial to investigate the reported close-monitoring and threats that are believed to have originated from the business sector and/or security officers.

Please stay updated on this evolving situation and take appropriate action to safeguard the rights and well-being of the affected communities and human rights defenders.

We acknowledge the work and efforts of the groups, The **Campaign For Public Policy On Mineral Resources ( PPM)** and **The Network of People who own Mineral Resources** for their invaluable legal and campaign advice, and their unwavering work and support in organizing and mobilizing the community. From the very beginning, these 2 groups have stood with The KhonRak BanKerd Dan Khon Thot group, and worked closely with the community-based HRDs.