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AusAID's Mining for Development Initiative slammed as an exercise in promoting Australian mining interests and perpetuating the resource curse

Australian Aid watchdog AID/WATCH and environmental organisation Friends of the Earth (FoE) are today holding a demonstration at the Mining for Development Conference venue to challenge AusAID, and supporters of the Mining for Development Initiative to affirm that aid money should not be used to promote Australian mining interests overseas.

AID/WATCH and FoE are critical of AusAID's \$127 million Mining for Development Initiative which claims to promote 'sustainable mining' – "mining that delivers long-term benefits to the economy and host communities, and to the natural environment." Over the next 2 days in Sydney, delegates at the AusAID Mining for Development Conference discuss how to maximise the benefits of mining.

Viewing mining as an unquestioned opportunity for resource-rich countries in the Global South is entirely unsubstantiated. To the contrary, there is a great body of evidence that suggests that the result of creating an extractives-dependent economy perpetuates the 'resource curse' which delivers harmful, long results to countries and environments and little benefit.

Funding under the Initiative has been used either directly or indirectly to promote Australian mining and business interests overseas. Activities have included The creation of the 'International Mining For Development Centre' in Perth, which facilitates study tours, workshops and visits to mine sites of companies such as Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton for officials from minerals-rich developing countries and funding the corporate social responsibility initiatives for at least 9 Australian mining companies in the Australian-Africa Mining Industry Group (AAMIG).

FoE representative Dr James Goodman said, 'Aid money should not be going towards lobbying for international policy change with stronger financial infrastructure for mining as this promotes a specific economic vision that entrenches rather than reduces poverty and ignores the necessary environmental damage mining produces'

AID/WATCH Director Thulsi Narayanasamy says, 'It should not be the role of AusAID to determine how developing countries ought to develop, particularly when AusAID have highlighted the 'strong commercial rationale' for Australia to invest aid money into mining. This is yet another example of our aid program being used to promote Australian interests at the expense of programs focussed on poverty alleviation.'

'There are countless struggles by disadvantaged people to protect the natural resources and the agricultural practices that sustain them from destruction by mining. AusAID should be aligning themselves with this vulnerable group of people, not with mining companies perpetuating the problem,' Ms Narayanasamy said.

AID/WATCH are hosting an Alternatives to Mining Forum in Sydney on 22nd June as a response to the Mining for Development Conference to explore alternative development pathways and build a regional alliance of resistance to the perpetuation of mining as a solution for developing countries.

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