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Thursday, March 22nd, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Press Statement on World Water Day

The Collective of Haitian Organizations that are fighting against mineral exploitation in the nation of Haiti honor World Water Day on March 22nd to denounce the great threat that mining exploitation presents to the State of Haiti.

The experiences of industrial metal mining all over the world show how it negatively affects water, diminishing quantity and quality. For example, a gold mining company uses 250 thousand litres of water every hour. In one day, a mining company may use the amount of water that a rural family in Haiti would use over 20 years, if not more. Companies contaminate groundwater and rivers due to the chemicals and heavy metals they use to process gold. One product that is particularly dangerous is cyanide, a violent poison that separates the gold from the rock. If not properly disposed, cyanide can contaminate rivers, springs, and even the water table.

Today, Haiti finds itself under the curse of the vultures, local and international, that use the poverty, illiteracy, and the indolence of the population to pillage our natural resources and to further drive the population into suffering. The experiences of mineral exploitation in countries such as Haiti (beginning with colonization in 1942, 1956-1972 with SEDREN, 1956-1982 with REYNOLDS), El Salvador, Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and other countries in Africa such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Ghana show that poverty and underdevelopment are the consequence of natural resource extraction. If we study these histories, the truth becomes clear and the propaganda that says that mineral exploitation brings jobs and development is proven to be an empty lie.

Today, more than 15% of land in the country is under control of multinational corporations that come to Haiti to do business with the resources in our ground. At the same time, gravel and sand mining continues without oversight. Many farmers in the country are threatened. The little piece of land that

they farm may be given to companies. National agricultural production is down and is on its way to disappearing in full due to companies' desire to claim the fertile land that grows food. Poverty and hunger will increase as the amount of arable land declines and the population grows. Today our natural springs, rivers, and wells are threatened of going dry and becoming contaminated with a series of chemical products such as cyanide, lead, and mercury. The amount of forested land is decreasing, too, despite the fact that Article 253 of the 1987 Constitution demands respect for the environment as the natural framework for human development. Today, we are faced with the draft Mining Law prepared by the Haitian government with technical support from the World Bank. The law is before Parliament. Everyone can see that the law fails to respect the spirit of the Constitution, as well as many of its provisions.

We denounce with all of our force the way that the Haitian State has permitted companies to enter to “do business,” without any respect for life or for the environment, particularly water. Companies are trying to convince rural residents that their lives will change due to mining. In addition, they threaten those who disagree with mining, those who note that, since the arrival of Columbus, mining has caused hunger, unemployment, poverty, suffering—particularly for farmers, residents of poor neighbourhoods, the workers, and the most disadvantaged.

The *Kolektif Jistis Min* denounces with all its force members of Parliament who facilitate mining, and who pay for the propaganda of companies that hold mineral permits, most of which have now expired. On this World Water Day, we send a warning to Parliament to not vote to pass the World Bank mining law, which is a poison hanging over our heads. We encourage Parliament to follow the example of El Salvador, where they adopted a law that prohibited metal mining in the entire country.

Kolektif Jistis Min (KJM) asks communities, organizations, and concerned citizens to stand up and demand that government authorities here and the ravenous companies back down from this dangerous—even deadly—proposal.

We can live without gold, We cannot live without water

Yes to life, No to Mining Exploitation!

For the Collective:

PAPDA, POHDH, MODEP, BATAY OUVRIYE, GARR, CE-JILAP, TET KOLE