

ARMENIA POISONED BY AND FOR GOLD

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By Suzanne Simonyan, Yerevan, 15 August 2013

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Kapan presents one such area of environmental depredation. Forests and mountains are being indiscriminately and violently exploited by such companies as Canadian-owned Deno Gold Mine (a subsidiary of [Dundee Precious Metals](#)). Meanwhile, the waste dump has become a threat to nature and to area residents. People working in the mines do so in severe conditions and are paid paltry sums. There is poverty everywhere as foreign companies penetrate deeper into the land.

Canada's Dundee Precious Metals

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In Syunik, a month ago, I was stunned by what I saw. Beautiful Syunik and its Syunyats Mountains have been for every Armenian impregnable fortresses since times immemorial. Having witnessed the tragedy unrolling in Syunik, I can state that if no measures are taken Syunik, its beautiful mountains and its forests will soon turn into a mine dump. The land and the nature in Syunik is being raped and robbed. But the most terrible development is the condition of the locals, their poverty and health problems, their despair and fear. On the drive back from Syunik, late at night, I lost count of the trucks. Loaded with thousands of tonnes of minerals, they were taking the wealth of Syunik from Armenia, while the people of Syunik can't make ends meet. The cargo the trucks carried did not have anything to do with the improvement of the locals' living conditions; they were just the life insurance of the looters.

Now there is another mountain scheduled for gold mining. The exploiter is Amulsar. A group of environmental activists insist that the operation is risky and can have a negative impact on the tourist town of Jermuk, the top-rated resort of Armenia. As experts see it, the mine will cause a decrease of mineral water flow. A composition of dust will appear after the Amulsar explosions. Jermuk's 

atmosphere will be critically damaged and the composition of the mineral water changed.

Environmental experts and activists are demanding the exploitation be stopped. To stop the project there must be joint public pressure, as government agencies support the mining companies. There are also concerns that Jermuk will stop being a tourist town as a consequence of mining, especially for foreign tourists who will stay away when they learn there is a mine nearby.

Although there's the potential for ecotourism in the area, the Amulsar operations will harm the local biodiversity, according to environmentalists. The steppe hawk and at least 14 endemic plant species, registered in the International Red Book or the Red Book of Armenia, also face danger because of rampant, unregulated mining.

Everything is being exterminated day by day. Nobody in authority cares for the people or for nature. Where are we going? Why are we destroying our homeland? What are the short- and long-term costs of mining? What can Diaspora do to support the just claims of the Armenians living in Armenia? How can our brothers in Diaspora/"Spyurk" help stop the rape of their homeland? Isn't it high time for Diaspora Armenian "greens" and for overseas experts to get involved in solving this mortal crisis?

Armenia is not only for Armenia Armenians but for all Armenians. We all--in Armenia and in the Diaspora--should get involved in the struggle to protect the environmental integrity of our homeland.

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