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Press Release

RESEARCH FINDINGS BY DOCTORS AND PUBLIC HEALTH EXPERTS: NO DISEASE CAUSED BY HEAVY METAL AT BUYAT PANTE

(Manado, 2 June 2006). The criminal case trial of PT Newmont Minahasa Raya (PTNMR) continued today in Manado, North Sulawesi in which three witnesses and experts testified. The three expert witnesses who testified are dr Sandra J.L. Rotty (head of Puskesmas Ratatotok), dr. Joy Rattu, Ph.D. (head of the graduate program study of public health and lecturer at the pure biology study program, the graduate program of UNSRAT) and Prof. DR. dr Winsy F. Th. Warouw (chairman of SMF Skin and Venereal Disease of Manado Emergency General Hospital /RSUP Manado and permanent lecturer of the Faculty of Medicine of UNSRAT).

As head of Puskesmas, dr. Sandra J.L. Rotty provides a regular report on the condition of public health in her area to the Department of Health. The Puskesmas' statistical data from 1999 show that the diseases suffered by the Ratatotok villagers and Buyat Pante villagers are Upper Respiratory Track Infection, gastritis, malaria and dermatitis. In response to the questions raised by the panel of judges on the lumps suffered by some Buyat Pante villagers, dr. Sandra replied: "Actually the lumps could have been removed, but when I referred them to the hospital, they refused it as they were not permitted by their NGOs and legal advisors. We even had to seek such a permit until 10 p.m., to no avail, whereas the other patients from East Ratatotok and Buyat Village willing to be operated by a surgeon from the Kadow Hospital are now well". Dr. Sandra further explained about the death of baby Andini: "After being medically prescribed, baby Andini was actually referred to the hospital for further treatment. However, the baby had never been brought to the hospital. Instead, the baby was often used for the purposes of demonstration. Then, we learned that baby died. When the condition of the baby was examined in the field, we found that the medicine had never been taken by baby Andini".

The MINISTRY OF HEALTH –RI team consisting of a director and staff of the directorate of sanitation and water restoration of Directorate General of P2M-PL and public health experts from the Faculty of Medicine, University of Indonesia (FKM UI), on July 21, 2004 took samples of water [in Buyat bay] and hair [of local villagers]. On August 8, 2004 the Health Ministry Team accompanied the research team from the Minamata Center of Japan to Buyat Bay to conduct a field review and take samples of hair, fish, river water and sea water. The team was accompanied with 3 policemen from the Resort Police of South Minahasa Regency to monitor the sampling process. Results of

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the study showed that there is no evidence showing that Minamata diseases occurred and there is no relationship between the diseases suffered by Buyat Pante villagers and the intoxication of heavy metals.

In her testimony, dr Joy Rattu further explained that studies on public health at Buyat Pante have been conducted by various specialist doctors with different expertise such as neurologists, dermatologists and paramedics and senior students from the Faculty of Medicine of UNSRAT on July 24, 2004 and August 3, 2004. “Research findings concluded that the diseases existing in that area are classified as diseases [itchiness] commonly found in the coastal area or in areas with poor sanitation.”, dr. Joy Rattu answered the questions raised by the Panel of Judges. “On an occasion where we would have the lumps removed, most of the villagers who came are from other villages. Buyat Pante villagers refused to have their lumps removed because the lumps would be used as evidence at court. As such, the lumps could not be removed,” added dr. Joy Rattu.

In his testimony, Prof. Dr. Winsy Warouw presented the findings of the UNSRAT research conducted in March and April 2001. The result of the study concludes that the skin diseases such as allergy, fungus infection and mycosis suffered by the local villagers are commonly found in the coastal community. The study also concluded that there is no symptom of mercury and arsenic heavy metal intoxication.

“It really hurts to know that some elements have prevented baby Andini from obtaining proper medication and treatment from doctors. It is shameful that those people have used the suffering of baby Andini for their personal interest as the pretext for staging a demonstration that has resulted in social unrest.” said Rick B. Ness in response to the testimonies made by the witnesses and experts today.

The testimonies made by public health and medical experts today have shown inconsistent and baseless accusations by the public prosecutors against PTNMR. “The information provided by the expert witnesses based on a series of scientific and credible studies shows that there is no Minamata disease nor disease caused by heavy metal intoxication at Buyat Bay. These facts have caused us to question the objectivity of this case. We believe that the accusations made against PTNMR and Rick Ness are incorrect and baseless,” according to Luhut MP Pangaribuan, Legal Advisor of PTNMR.
