

## **Newmont executive confident about winning pollution trial in Indonesia**

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Associated Press  
2 August 2005

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) - An executive for U.S.-based mining giant Newmont predicted Tuesday he and his company would be cleared of allegations that they polluted a bay in Indonesia and sickened villagers.

Richard Ness, who heads Newmont Mining Corp.'s Indonesian subsidiary, said its gold mine on Sulawesi island caused no environmental harm and that a "fair, open and transparent hearing of the facts" at a trial that opens Friday would prove that.

"Everybody involved in this firmly believes we have not done anything wrong. There is no pollution," said Ness, a 55-year-old native of the U.S. state of Minnesota. "I am very confident about what the evidence shows. We will be exonerated."

Ness and the company's local unit, Newmont Minahasa Raya, are charged under a section of the country's environmental law that makes it a crime to intentionally or negligently engage in acts that result in pollution.

If convicted, he faces 10 years in jail.

Some residents allege that mine tailings dumped in the bay led to skin diseases and tumors, but tests have produced conflicting results.

The World Health Organization and an initial Environment Ministry report found the water unpolluted. But tests done by the national police, which are expected to be the basis for the prosecution case, show levels of mercury and arsenic in the bay well beyond the country's standards.

Newmont began operations at the site 2,000 kilometers (1,300 miles) northeast of Jakarta in 1996, and stopped mining two years ago after extracting all the gold it could. But the company continued processing ore until Aug. 31, 2004, when the mine was permanently shut.

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