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Eppawela phosphate mining agreement deplored

The Sri Lanka Association for Theology said in a statement that it is deeply concerned for the people of Eppawela, most of them farmers, who are in danger of losing their ancestral properties and being settled elsewhere, due to the government's apparent decision or intention to enter an agreement for Phosphate mining at Eppawela with the Freeport McMoran / IMC Agrico and Tomen Corporation of Japan. Such an agreement if implemented would be a colossal human and environmental tragedy with the displacement of about 12,000 people residing in several villages, the destruction of their lands, forests and way of life: and the pollution of their environment, especially the waters of the historic Jaya Ganga. Furthermore, ancient Buddhist Temples, priceless archeological sites and rich cultural heritage will be despoiled. It is reported

ed that the area needed for the total phosphate mining operations could ultimately spread over 800 square kilometres, although the "exploration area" is meant to cover 56 square kilometres. In addition, 450 acres of land is required for a processing plant at Trincomalee. We have reason to be alarmed that according to the terms of this agreement and in the context of limited phosphate deposits throughout the world, our entire phosphate deposit at Eppawela could be exhausted in about 30 years! We wonder whatever happened to our commitment by sustainable development?"

It is most unfortunate that an alternative environment friendly plan for sustainable phosphate mining acceptable to the people of the area and presented by eminent scientists of the National Science Foundation has been set aside by the government. This plan would

make these phosphate resources available for the manufacture of fertiliser for the nations use over a much longer period of two to three hundred years, and still not disturb the human and environmental balance of the area. In spite of this a valuable national resource is being sold for short term profit despite the protests of the people of Eppawela over the past few years, supported by a coalition of peasants' groups, women's groups, trade unions, religious organisations and environmental groups; the statement said.

As Christians we mourn, repent and apologise, for sins of the past centuries against Mother earth and all living beings. Much of these sins resulted from misguided and violent missionary enterprises undertaken by the church," it claimed.