

Balochistan's Reko Diq copper mine: Mineral extraction must respect human rights and the environment

Dozens of international CSOs call on international financiers, including the International Finance Corporation and the Asian Development Bank, to reconsider financing this dangerous project.

We, the undersigned civil society organisations, call on international financiers¹ of the Reko Diq copper mine to urgently heed the warnings from civil society about the excessive risks associated with this project. Located in an intensely militarised region, where civic space is very closed and where reprisals against civil society actors have increased in recent months, this project risks exacerbating the insecurity of human rights defenders and contributing to environmental and social destruction.

Despite this, a long list of development finance institutions and export credit agencies have lined up to provide loans to the project developer, the Reko Diq Mining Company (RDMC - a subsidiary of Barrick Mining). This includes multilateral development banks, such as the International Finance Corporation (IFC - the World Bank's private sector arm) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). On 12 June 2025, the IFC approved a combined \$700 million investment in RDMC (an A loan of [\\$300 million](#) plus a [\\$400 million](#) subordinated loan under the IDA20 Private Sector Window), while the ADB is [set to approve](#) \$300 million financing package for RDMC (a \$180 million loan plus a \$120 million guarantee) on 20 August.

It is clear, given the current situation in Balochistan, that it would be impossible for the IFC and ADB to uphold the safeguards they have adopted against environmental and social risks, and their policies against reprisals and investing in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, if they proceed with their financing of RDMC. These investments would also undermine the commitments made by IFC and ADB's shareholders to support sustainable development, responsible business practice, and climate action.

While we understand that copper is considered to be a critical mineral for the energy transition, extraction projects must also respect human and environmental rights. In 2024, an expert panel convened by the UN Secretary General [recommended that](#) "human rights must be at the core of all mineral value chains" and that multilateral co-operation in this sector must promote peace and security. Unfortunately, the project proposed by RDMC does not meet these standards.

We therefore call on the IFC and ADB to pause all funding for RDMC until the following concerns have been addressed.

1. The impossibility of ensuring effective stakeholder engagement in repressive contexts

Balochistan has been subjected to an ongoing internal conflict, characterised by heavy political suppression and violence, for several decades. In [April 2025 alone](#), human rights advocates reported the suspension of communication services, intimidation, and repression by security forces, the forced disappearance of 168 people, and the extrajudicial killing of 67 people. This has also been accompanied by a [broader crackdown](#) against human rights defenders in the region. [UN human rights experts](#) have classified the situation as a "serious human rights violation and an international crime". Despite this, the IFC [disclosure page claims](#) that RDMC has undertaken four rounds of stakeholder engagement.

We call into question the fundamental assertion of effective stakeholder engagement in such an atmosphere of fear and repression. Those who have raised concerns about the project previously, such as the [Human Rights Council of Balochistan](#), have seen their members [detained](#), in what UN experts classify as reprisals by state forces (bearing in mind that 50% of RDMC shares are owned by regional and national governments). In this context, it is an unfair burden to expect local communities to raise opposition to this project, given the pervasive atmosphere of fear and repression across Balochistan.

¹ As well as IFC and ADB, proposed lenders include Export Development Canada, Finnvera, the German development bank KfW, Japanese Bank of International Cooperation, Sweden's EKN, and the US' Development Finance Corporation and US EXIM banks.

2. Impacts on Indigenous Peoples

RDMC has ignored the presence of the Indigenous Baloch population in its [Environmental and Social Impact Assessment \(ESIA\)](#), classifying the Baloch people as an "ethnic minority". Under both ADB and IFC safeguards, the Baloch people meet the definition of Indigenous Peoples. They possess a distinct language and cultural identity, self-identify as Indigenous, have strong ancestral and territorial ties to the region, and maintain their separate and distinct customary institutions. This has been recognised by the Baloch communities themselves, is recognised in case law and is widely affirmed in international scholarship. For example, the *Sher Zaman v. Government of Balochistan* case acknowledged the Baloch as "indigenous tribes and sub-tribes" with established customary boundaries and tribal governance. Academic studies describe the sardari system and jirga councils as integral political and legal institutions distinct from Pakistani state structures. The Baloch's unique governance systems, cultural identity and economic and political institutions satisfy international legal criteria for Indigenous Peoples' institutional distinctness. The ESIA should therefore be corrected to recognise the Baloch as Indigenous Peoples.

Furthermore, RDMC's suggestion (in the ESIA) that it will "collaborate with the Government of Balochistan to ensure that the Baloch and other marginalised groups are sufficiently represented in the Project's decision making process", while acknowledging that the Baloch people have suffered "conflicts with state security agencies" and detentions by state forces, is wholly inappropriate. This suggestion of relying on the same state security agencies who are most often perpetrators of violence against the Indigenous Baloch people is highly problematic. Furthermore, by denying the impacts that this project will have on Indigenous Peoples, RDMC is denying the Baloch people their rights with regard to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), stakeholder engagement, land rights and cultural heritage.

3. Impacts on water, air, health and livelihoods

Serious concerns have been raised, including by Pakistan's Supreme Court, about Reko Diq's potential [exacerbation of water scarcity](#) in Balochistan, and about outstanding harms from previous attempts to develop the site, including [cyanide poisoning and health impacts](#). This is in addition to the documented impacts on human and animal health, and water and air quality, that can be expected with large-scale, industrial [copper extraction](#) projects. This includes increased risk of respiratory illnesses, neurological disorders and other chronic diseases in humans, and poisoning, reduced fertility, stunted growth and increased mortality in animals. Indeed, the [IFC Disclosure page](#) acknowledges that the project will emit significant particulate matter which will impact air quality and project workers.

Meanwhile, local workers at the site have faced labour violations. In one [documented incident on 20 August 2023](#), it was reported that four Baloch Indigenous workers were fired by [military-owned security guards hired by Barrick](#) without explanation and forced to leave the Reko Diq camp. These young men were left to walk on foot for hours in 39°C heat, posing serious risks to their health and safety.

The mine also has the potential to reshape the livelihoods of local communities, particularly those dependent on pastoralism and small-scale agriculture. The project will require significant land acquisition, which will restrict access to grazing lands and seasonal migration routes critical for livestock herders. In an already arid region, the mine's substantial water use risks depleting or contaminating scarce groundwater sources, undermining crop irrigation and drinking water for animals and people. Dust emissions can also damage pasture vegetation, reduce crop yields, and contaminate fodder with heavy metals, which in turn can harm animal health and reduce market value for livestock products. These changes will force herders and farmers to alter their way of life, fundamentally impacting their livelihoods, forcing many to find alternatives or migrate.

4. The construction of a heavy fuel oil (HFO) power plant to power the project.

The project [ESIA also acknowledges](#) that the project will generate "approximately 850,000 tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO₂e), with approximately 75% attributable to direct emissions from the combustion of HFO and diesel fuel" to power the mine. This will increase Pakistan's national greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to further exacerbating the country's vulnerability to climate change. Despite

this, RDMC has made no robust commitments to mitigate these emissions. The company claims only that a solar plant will help in the future to reduce the need for HFO, that as a transition mineral project the mine "could contribute to GHG emission reductions in other sectors", and that other emissions mitigation technologies are constrained by cost. This is unacceptable and does not meet the claims made by IFC and ADB, and their shareholders, to only finance projects that are aligned with the Paris Agreement.

5. Barrick Mining's irresponsible approach to mining

The evidence from Barrick's operations in other contexts, and recent incidents with Barrick CEO Mark Bristow, demonstrate that Barrick is not a company that can be trusted to handle such a sensitive project with the required care. In the past, Barrick Mining's operations have been linked to cases of reprisals and human rights abuses; at the [North Mara Gold Mine](#) in Tanzania where violence by police and private mine security allegedly led to several deaths, and in the [Porgera Gold Mine](#) in Papua New Guinea, where private security forces employed by the mine have committed abuse and sexual violence. These incidents, among others, raise serious questions about the ability of the company to treat this project with the sensitivity and thoughtfulness it deserves, keeping in mind the historical repression of the Baloch people and risks that the communities face.

Given the above, we therefore urge IFC, ADB and all other lenders to RDMC and Barrick Mining to reconsider their decisions, and to urgently engage with civil society organisations that are sounding the alarm on this project. By investing in this project, development banks risk undermining the very commitments they claim to uphold through their institutional safeguards and policies.

Endorse this letter by filling out the form here:

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1. Accountability Counsel
2. AidWatch
3. Alyansa Tigil Mina (ATM)
4. AMAN Maluku
5. Arab Watch Coalition
6. Asia Indigenous Peoples Network on Extractive Industries and Energy (AIPNEE)
7. Asia-Pacific Network of Environmental Defenders
8. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
9. Bank Climate Advocates
10. Bretton Woods Project
11. Community Empowerment and Social Justice Network (CEMSOJ)
12. Defenders in Development
13. Ecoton
14. GAIA Asia Pacific
15. Global Justice Now
16. Inclusive Development International
17. Indigenous Rights Legal
18. Inisiasi Masyarakat Adat (IMA)
19. Initiative for Right View
20. International Accountability Project
21. International Rivers
22. Jamaa Resource Initiatives
23. KOTHOWAIN (Vulnerable Peoples Development Organization)
24. MiningWatch Canada
25. National Indigenous Women Forum (NIWF)
26. Oyu Tolgoi Watch

27. Palangkaraya Ecological and Human Rights Studies (PROGRESS)
28. POSSIBLE FUTURES
29. Recourse
30. Rivers without Boundaries Coalition
31. SERUNI
32. Society for Peace and Sustainable Development
33. Sukaar Welfare Organization
34. Terranusa Indonesia
35. The Oakland Institute
36. Urgewald