

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

April 11, 2012 at 4:04pm

Filipinos protest monstrous impact of mall expansion

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Eco Catholic

MANILA, Philippines -- Bishop Carlito Cenzon of Baguio on Wednesday accused a Philippines shopping mall giant of defying the law and called people to boycott the shopping center in his northern mountain city to protest its expansion project, which requires the transplanting of trees.

Cenzon said when people give SM Mall their business, they continue to "patronize a monster" because the mall's project "destroys our oxygen tank."

The regional court Tuesday ordered the mall to halt the transplant of 182 alnus and pine trees from Luneta Hill compound as part of its expansion project, but the mall proceeded with digging up trees, citing consultations it had already conducted with the environment and natural resources department. Cenzon of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary said mall officials refused to receive the court order.

Mall operator SM Prime said on its website that its expansion project was part of a permanent solution for problems related to top soil erosion. Operators said a retaining wall needs to be built and the 50,000 trees that will be affected by required excavation would be transplanted.

The expansion would add 76,000 square meters to the current 106,000-square-meter mall for additional stores, restaurant and entertainment facilities.

SM Prime said the project is certified by Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, an internationally recognized standard for green building design and construction. SM Prime aims to have 46 malls in the Philippines and five in China at the end of this year.

The enterprise claims to exercise corporate social responsibility by donating to education, workers and other construction projects, including construction of the Shrine of Jesus, The Way The Truth and The

Life in Pasay City; John Paul II Youth Center in Roxas Boulevard; and St. John Mary Vianney-Galilee Development and Retreat Center for priests in Tagaytay City.

In their occupation of the Philippines in the early 1900s, Americans led the development of Baguio City in Benguet Province as a resort for soldiers and civilian volunteers. Today, it has five forest reserves, three of which are watersheds that serve as sources of the city's water supply.

Baguio diocese, established as a prelature in 1932, in 2009 had 42 local and foreign priests serving almost 500,000 Catholics. American Maryknoll Sisters arrived in 1928. After a powerful earthquake in 1990 destroyed their convent, the sisters closed their school and developed an integrated program promoting "earth-based values" through the Maryknoll Sisters' Center for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, popularly known as Maryknoll Ecological Sanctuary.

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