

A new complaint is filed at the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, known as the 'Bern Convention' because The Armenian government has jeopardised three natural sites slated for protection for their unique biodiversity by moving ahead with plans for the USD 426 million Amulsar gold mine.

The complaint details how the government ignored evidence in the environmental impact assessment of the Amulsar gold mine, which pointed to significant impacts on the flora and fauna at the Djermuk, Gorhajk and Sevan Lake candidate Emerald sites, a designation given by the Bern Convention to areas of outstanding natural significance.

Construction of the Amulsar gold project started in 2016 but since June 2018 has been stopped by local protestors blocking access to the mine. The project received CAD 5.8 million in equity and a CAD 10.5 million capital increase from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development in 2009 and 2016, respectively.

Already 70 per cent complete, the Amulsar project would excavate metal ore from open pits and extract gold with cyanide in a heap leach facility. The project has already damaged the Emerald sites by polluting the nearby Arpa River and could cause further damage to species and habitats through the pollution of waters that flow into the three candidate sites.

Construction of the mine facilities has also destroyed surrounding lands and increased dust pollution.

Andrey Ralev, independent biodiversity expert and signatory to the complaint, said "The Amulsar mine is causing havoc for more than 70 protected animals, dozens of endemic plant species and the largest fresh-water body in the Caucasus, Lake Sevan. Do the ends justify the means?"

Fidanka McGrath, policy officer of CEE Bankwatch Network, said, "Destroying biodiversity now and paying to protect it later is a risky approach by the EBRD. The bank is bound by EU standards and its investments were supposed to offset the impacts on biodiversity. But in reality the harm to the Emerald network has been done, and the compensation is simply not there."

Inga Zarafyan, president of 'EcoLur informational NGO', said: "The Armenian government should confirm its focus on European values, and comply with obligations adopted in the framework of international conventions."

Source: bankwatch.org