# Pacific Asia Resource Center (PARC)

The Pacific Asia Resource Center (PARC) is a non-profit organization committed to global, social and economic justice. Since 1973, it has worked with people's movements in Japan to develop solidarity links with people in struggle in countries mainly in the Asia Pacific region. The name derives from its role in collecting, preserving and sharing publications and resources from people's movements across the region. It remains committed to building international solidarity.

PARC was instrumental in setting up the pilot of Electronics Watch's work monitoring mining operations linked to global electronics supply chains.

In this profile, we talk to Shigeru Tanaka, Executive Director of PARC and co-chair of the Electronics Watch Board of Trustees.

## What are the main issues you're facing in your work?

We are mainly working on environmental and human rights issues relating to the mining sector. Some of the most egregious cases have involved generational losses of environment – in Fiji, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Our focus is on indigenous peoples' right to self-determination, through the lens of environmental destruction.

At the moment we are working mostly with communities affected by mining. The challenge is that there is sometimes a tension between those communities and the mine workers: workers have a vested interest in mining continuing, while affected communities often want it to stop. This can make monitoring work very complicated.



Shigeru Tanaka, Executive Director of PARC and co-chair of the Electronics Watch Board of Trustees

## Can you tell us about an achievement you are proud of?

In Fiji, a copper mine was planned. The environmental impact looked so dire that there was huge community opposition. We collaborated with the local indigenous groups and raised their case with the Fijian government as well as investors in the mining company. In April this year, the project was dropped. We were really pleased that mining company representatives made a formal visit to community elders, thanked them for hospitality, and told them that they would withdraw the project completely.

## What are the biggest challenges in your monitoring work?

In Fiji it was a significant victory to stop the mine before it started, and that's the hard part. The environmental impact is normally only visible once it's too late – when the mountains are already deforested and there's no going back. But before mining begins we get accused of crying wolf. The companies make a lot of promises to local communities about how they will protect the environment and dismiss us as exaggerating. So we try to bring community members to visit similar mines in the region so they can see for themselves the impact that mining will have. When they see that for themselves, they are then more likely to insist that their local decisionmakers visit too, and that influences the decision they make about whether to allow mining to begin.

Another challenge is that sometimes, the affected communities want nothing to do with the mining company, just for mining to stop and the company to leave. But people with leverage, who could alleviate the environmental impact, are people working within the mining sector.

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*Plant I and II of Coral Bay Nickel Corporation, Palawan, where PARC is campaigning for suspension of mining activities. Photo credit: FoE Japan, 2012*

In some cases, companies are willing to listen and learn how to improve the impact of their operations. But if the community doesn't want any engagement at all with the mining company, then we have to respect that. It's their decision.

We might see opportunities to stop operations of a company with a poor track record. But if the affected community decides to settle for a small victory – like a guaranteed supply of clean water, even though the river remains polluted – then we can't push them to pursue more. The dynamic can be similar with workers: we must support their struggle and only go as far as they are willing to go.

> *Having vocal affiliates saying they care, and are willing to take action to show they care, gives us a place at the table for negotiations. We are really grateful for the existence of this affiliate community.*

## How does the partnership with Electronics Watch support your work?

It's so important that downstream buyers begin to question integrity of upstream suppliers, and Electronics Watch really helps with this. Mining companies never sell direct to consumers, but always B2B (business to business), so to them it doesn't matter what the wider public think.

But when public buyers say, "we think these issues are important, we will take action if we see something wrong is happening," then that gives us leverage. Having vocal affiliates saying they care, and are willing to take action to show they care, gives us a place at the table for negotiations. We are really grateful for the existence of this affiliate community.




*Shigeru Tanaka (far right) presents a petition against nickel operations in Palawan with colleagues from Friends of the Earth (FoE) Japan. Photo credit: FoE Japan, 2026*

**What changes would you like to see for workers' rights, at national and international level?**

We need to see change to the burden of proof. Companies have flashy marketing statements and policies that look good on paper, and they are assumed to be innocent until wrongdoing is proved. It's workers who have to prove it when something is going wrong, and that's extremely difficult because the workers are already squeezed as far as companies can squeeze them. Companies may brush off complaints as just one single incident.

Buyers often take the companies' word for it, that everything is fine. All evidence has to be scrutinised and can sometimes be flawed or exaggerated. But in our experience, in the vast majority of cases, the workers were right and human rights abuses could have been stopped much sooner if someone had listened to the workers and taken action.

**What are PARC's goals for the next 5 years?**

To make sure China and Japan don't get into a hot war! PARC arose from the peace movement, in opposition to the Vietnam war. Our predecessors were desperate for Japan not to be involved in the atrocities of that war. The current team feel we are in a similar position now: we are worried about the heating environment and perceptions of China as a 'threat' to Japan, Southeast Asia, and the US. For some time it was a tinderbox, but now we see smoke.

Electronics Watch's work is important in this context because it allows us to say there are economic, pragmatic reasons to not have a war with China. Monitoring in China is difficult, but possible. Holding companies operating within China to international standards is possible.

Trade can take place with countries that we think of as beyond our control and influence. As long as the electronics industry depends on China for its supply chain, there will be pressure to not have hot war. The EU being willing to do business with China adds to that pressure. We want to keep international companies producing in China: decoupling would be a dangerous slope that increases likelihood of war.

It sounds like a big claim, but Electronics Watch is helping keep Japan and China out of war!

**A lighter question to end on: what do you enjoy most about your work with PARC?**

Working with frontline communities. I'm always honoured that they and workers are willing to put trust in us to be their advocates, enhance their voices. Human interaction, eating the same food, drinking the same water, being in the struggle together, is really important to me. Our monitoring is not that expensive because we don't usually stay in hotels, we sleep in union offices in a sleeping bag or are offered somewhere to stay in the community. I find joy in that.

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**You're also one of the co-chairs on the Electronics Watch board of trustees. Do you have a final message for affiliates?**

Talk to the workers! Monitoring partners are always willing to help affiliates talk to workers. If you want to speak with them we will try to help you connect. To keep workers safe we have to take particular care in authoritarian states but online tools mean it is still often possible. It can be a very empowering experience for workers to be listened to. Even if you can't do anything to help their situation immediately, knowing that people in other parts of the world care about what happens to them is really important.

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Pipeline carrying water from tailings facility to the sea, Palawan. Photo credit: FoE Japan, 2010

Learn more about PARC's environmental work with Friends of the Earth Japan and Electronics Watch in our publication Human Rights and Environmental Impact of Nickel Mining at Rio Tuba, or watch A cry for Palawan and What is at stake behind the energy transition.