

ANU students act on mud disaster

Fund to help villagers left 'in void'

By JENNA HAND

IT WAS straight out of a doomsday movie.

Two years ago last Thursday, a volcano of steaming mud erupted when a mining company was drilling for natural gas near Sidoarjo city in East Java, Indonesia.

All efforts to stop the flow of mud failed. To date, the advancing sludge has swamped 11 villages and forced tens of thousands of people from their homes. It shows no signs of stopping.

ANU student Sarah Rennie, 23, decided something needed to be done to help the mud refugees after visiting the area last year

while on exchange. "It's a humanitarian disaster. There's literally no aid," she said.

"There are people who've lost their homes, their businesses. All the water supplies are polluted from the mud. And the gas that pushes the mud out is a toxic gas as well ... It's a pretty messy situation."

Together with a fellow student, Arjuna Dibley, Ms Rennie formed the Australian Sidoarjo Assistance Project to raise money for those affected by the mud and lobby the mining companies and Indonesian Government to take action.

Mining companies involved in the project blame the disaster on



The mudflow has swamped 11 villages in East Java.

Photo: GREENPEACE/VINAI DITHAJOHN

an earthquake that happened two days earlier and about 300km away, but experts believe drilling caused the eruption.

Ms Rennie, who speaks Bahasa and some Javanese, said refugees told her they felt like they had "fallen into a void" between business and government.

"Systems have failed here. A political system has just failed to act adequately, and the corporate sector has failed to take responsibility. So when these systems fail, the community has to step up and take the lead," she said.

"We know we're not going to raise the several billions required

to fix this catastrophe. We're trying to echo what civil groups in Indonesia are saying: that this is a big human rights issue and the current response isn't adequate."

Australian mining company Santos had an 18 per cent share in the project and has contributed funds to help the victims. Earlier this year, the Indonesian Government announced it would compensate the residents of three villages.

■ The launch of the Australian Sidoarjo Assistance Project takes place today from 1-4pm at The Front Cafe, Wattle St, Lyneham. There will be music from DJ Jitwam Sinha, Spartak, Jonathan Cohen, Chris Nivin and Yabi, as well as reports and videos from the mud site. Entry is by donation.



Film's entry into New York festival to showcase 'shady' Canberrans

By EMILY SHERLOCK

A FILM about Australian mob bosses made in the Canberra region has been accepted into one of the world's largest film festivals.

Hobby Farm, which features local actors and extras will be part of the New York International Independent Film and Video Festival in September and co-writer and actor Paul Murphy said all involved were "very excited".

"It is a pretty big festival and not that easy to get into, it is prestigious," he said. "It has definitely made all the work worth it and is really satisfying."

Murphy said the film - which is still in the post-production phase with Silver Sun Pictures - had also scored three out of four stars by critics.

"We were competing against a lot of people just to get in and three stars out of four ... it's just great."

The film was shot around the Goulburn region over five weeks last year with former asylum Kenmore Hospital and the historic Roundhouse Railway Museum used as key sites.

More than 50 actors and extras were involved, including Canberrans who were happy to indulge their shady side for a few hours of mock gambling.

Set in the 1970s, the film traces the story of Jules, a petty criminal who takes

the fall for a mob boss and is sentenced to five years' imprisonment.

On his release, his former bosses reward his loyalty by putting him in charge of the "Hobby Farm", a rundown estate with gambling dens and prostitutes abducted from Eastern Europe which acts as a holiday camp for the mob.

As Jules becomes attached to the women, he has a moral crisis and decides to help them escape.

Murphy said other responses to the film had so far been positive, with the quality of the cinematography and screen-play commented on.

"They also reckon it is great that we did a good old-fashioned gangster film," he said.

Negotiations were continuing about how and when the film would be distributed and released in Australia, with hopes pinned on a theatrical release.

Murphy now has a second film in the pipeline which will be a US DVD release.

The New York International Independent Film and Video Festival is recognised as one of the leading film events on the independent festival circuit with entries from as far afield as Brazil, Kenya and Japan.

Past festivals have included the work of the likes of Ewan McGregor, Cameron Diaz, Eva Herzigova, Guy Pearce and George Clooney.

Co-writer and actor Paul Murphy in a scene from *Hobby Farm*, which will feature in an independent film festival.



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