

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
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STATEMENT OF THE PHILIPPINES

As read by Ms. Jannette Serrano, Chairperson
Philippine National Commission for Indigenous Peoples
On 18 May 2006

Madame Chairperson,

The Philippines extends its warmest congratulations to the Permanent Forum and to your bureau for this constructive dialogue.

I am thankful to the ILO Geneva for sending me here.

I am the Chairperson of the Philippines National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, and a member of the Blaan tribe of Southern Philippines.

In that capacity, I would like to say *Few flabi de game, Kamde y.* That is the traditional Blaan greeting.

The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples is the primary agency responsible for the formulation and implementation of policies, plans and programs to protect and promote the interests and well-being of the 12-million indigenous peoples and 110 ethnic groups in the Philippines.

That is 15% of the country's population- and about equal to the population of New York City.

The Philippines welcomes the Permanent Forum's Special Theme on the Millennium Development Goals and Indigenous Peoples.


As those goals inform policy and programming, it is crucial to ensure the participation of communities in planning and implementation.

Our Medium Term Development Plan for 2004 to 2010 has been praised by prominent economist Dr. Jeffrey Sachs as "among the best, if not the bests around" because it adheres so closely to the MDGs.

This Medium Term Plan pays specific attention to concerns of indigenous peoples - particularly education, youth and women, and asset reform, which refers to land rights.

Land rights and ancestral domain also receive prominent attention in our Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act, or IPRA.

This landmark legislation puts into national law the principles of the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and ILO convention 169, which we intend to ratify.

After 8 years of implementation, let me report to this forum that the  commission has secured tenure of more than 200 families from more than 30 tribes. This covers almost a million hectares, which represents 15% of the targeted 6-million hectares of ancestral domain, lands and waters.

The IPRA embodies several key rights, including: cultural integrity, ancestral domain, equal protection and non-discrimination, and the right to self-governance and empowerment.

Most pertinent to this year's special theme, the law recognizes indigenous peoples' right to determine and decide priorities in development.

An example of this in action: The COMPACT program of the UN Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme completed a comprehensive baseline assessment and site strategy for the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park in Palawan Province.

This process included all concerned stakeholders including indigenous *tagbanwas* and *bataks* tribes.

The Philippine government incorporated this participatory site strategy as the favored management approach for the park.

Madame Chairperson, IPRA is also the legal framework for the peace process that the Philippines is pursuing in areas of conflict in parts of the South.

Even so, there is apprehension of conflicting claims amongst the communities involved. Some may be marginalized in favor of the claims of the more vocal groups.

For example, the situation in the South is primarily between national government and the 13 Muslim *Bangsa Moro* groups. However, 22 non-Islamized groups, including my *Blaan* tribe, are affected.

A possible solution to protect all stakeholders is to emphasize customary laws and revive traditional agreements amongst groups.

Madame Chairperson, distinguished delegates, fellow government officers, and officers of international agencies -

I would like to strongly inform you all that: WE EXIST.

The Philippine National Commission on Indigenous Peoples is here and eager to work with you.

Our young agency has a mandate larger than its pockets.

Like the communities it protects, the commission tends to be marginalized.

International agencies and funders overlook us and give funds to bodies less directly involved in indigenous issues.

Please, remember: WE ARE HERE!

I am happy to announce that the Philippines is one of the members of the historic human rights council.

We reiterate our commitment to promote, protect, and fulfill human rights, including and especially rights of indigenous peoples.

My country fully supports the finalization of the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This should be one of the priorities of the Council.

Thank you. *Bong Salamat.*