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REVIEW OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CORDILLERA PROVINCES: NORTHERN LUZON

The Ibaloi people, together with other indigenous peoples inhabiting the Grand Cordillera mountain range in northern Luzon are known as the Igorot people. The Igorot number around 600,000 people and we are among the 6½ million indigenous or tribal peoples living in the Philippines.

This is the first time that a member of an indigenous people from the Philippines will speak at a session of the UN Working Group on indigenous populations, and I wish to inform the working group about recent developments affecting the human rights and fundamental freedoms of my people.

Our experience and understanding of our oppression are showing us the way forward in articulating our rights which must be guaranteed and protected if we are to survive as distinct peoples.

The Igorot people and other indigenous peoples in the Philippines were not colonized during the Spanish colonial period from the 16th to 19th century. We have successfully maintained our traditional homelands, our political institutions and our cultural traditions through the American, and Japanese periods from 1900 -1945. And up to today, we still exhibit a high degree of self-reliance and independence.

Because we have successfully resisted colonization, we have not been assimilated into the dominant colonial culture which is now Christianized and exhibits strong features of the long years of Spanish and American rule. Our culture is still centrally the traditional Malay culture which has been ours prior to colonization.

Out of the present Philippine population of around 50 million, the indigenous peoples constitute 6½ million or 15% of the whole. We are defined by the government as national cultural minorities.

Our people, the indigenous peoples do not enjoy equality under the Philippine state. Even if the Philippine constitution provides that "The state shall consider the customs, traditions, beliefs and interests of national cultural communities in the formulation and implementation of state poli-

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cies," we suffer today from discrimination and national oppression, which has been our situation since the advent of colonization.

During the American period, through the Public Land Act of 1902, all land which was without Spanish title was declared part of the public domain. Subsequently, other laws were passed which allocated public lands for mining and logging concessions, forest reservations, pasture leases and other purposes. These laws totally disregarded the indigenous peoples prior rights to the land and our indigenous law which existed long before the colonial creation of the Philippine state. These laws are still the basis of present day law. More recent laws like Presidential Decree 410 - (Declaring Ancestral Lands Occupied and Cultivated by National Cultural Communities Alienable and Disposable, and for Other Purposes) and Presidential Decree 705 (Other wise known as the Revised Forestry Code of the Philippines) seriously undermine and take away the indigenous peoples rights to their land.

The non-recognition and violations of our rights as peoples - our land rights and our right to self-determination - has led to the steady deterioration and continuous worsening of our problems as a people.

Our present problems are:

First, the violation of our people's rights to our ancestral domain. By virtue of unjust land laws, direct landgrabbing and so-called development projects, The Philippine government has attempted to dismember the Cordillera ancestral domain, and has made us squatters in our own land. If we allow this continue, the very territorial base of our distinction as a people will be threatened;

Second, the denial and deprivation of our ancestral proprietary rights to the utilization, disposition and management of all the natural resources within the ancestral domain. While so much of the wealth of the Cordillera has been tapped by the state and big business, we have not been given a fair share in the beneficial returns of such development.

Third, the non-recognition of the persistent viability of our indigenous socio-political structures and political misrepresentation. In many parts of the Cordillera, we continue to practise and have recourse to our indigenous institutions such as the ator and the hodong, but these structures do not receive recognition in the present set-up. Instead bureaucratic structures have been imposed, as also the artificial division of the Cordillera into two regions. Worse, there have been instances when our insti-

tutions have been misused by the state and the military to create divisions among us.

Fourth, disrespect and non-recognition of our cultural identity and integrity. Our rituals and our cultural traditions have been vulgarized and commercialized for the tourist dollar. Movies and the mass media continue to disrespect indigenous culture and spread discriminatory ideas about indigenous peoples.

Fifth, militarization. Because of our people's growing awareness of common problems and a growing Cordillera unity, the Cordillera region is now heavily militarized. Numerous abuses have been committed against our people. Even whole communities have been displaced from our ancestral lands.

The heavy militarization in our homelands is threatening our very right to life, to physical integrity and the security of our people.

I now wish to cite the recent developments in my home which are an example of the very real and urgent situations that we, as indigenous peoples are facing.

In the months of June, July and up to the present, large-scale military operations by the Armed Forces of the Philippines have been taking place in the homelands of the Igorot people in northern Luzon. These so-called counter-insurgency operations are aimed "at clearing and occupying" the boundary areas of the three provinces Abra, Mountain Province and Kalinga-Apayao, which are deep in the traditional heartlands of the Tingguian, Kankanai, Bontoc and Kalinga people.

Since the operations started in June, the area has been saturated with 3,000 troops composed of the 41st and 48th Philippine Army Infantry battalions and reinforced by a composite group of Marines, Scout Rangers and Constabulary soldiers. Philippine Air Force T-28 war planes and helicopters bombed and strafed various villages in Tinglayan municipality and Batwagan in late June and early July. The extent of the damage has yet to be assessed. Several villages were declared "no man's land" where entry and departure from these villages were banned and where strict curfews are also in force. There are documented cases of summary execution, gang-rapes of women, indiscriminate firing of arms and theft of food and livestock.

Because of the ongoing military campaign, the rice crop from the terraced fields have not been harvested. The mere presence of persons outside their homes could invite being shot by the military.

Since the campaign is massive and may take a long time, there are fears that the people in the affected areas will suffer forced evacuation, hunger, disruption of family and community life, neglect of their farms and livelihood and ultimately death. The Kalinga-Bontoc Peace Pact Holders Association, and organization of the respected elders and indigenous leaders has called the campaign a "genocidal campaign" against the tribal peoples.

Strong appeals have been made by the indigenous people's organizations, the local civilian authorities, the local church and Philippine human rights organizations to immediately stop the military operations, which continue up to today.

Madame Chairperson, detailed documentations is available on these recent events, which I will submit to this working group.

Situations such as those being suffered by my people underline the urgency of the responsibilities before us today. I would therefore urge the following actions:

1. That this assembly reaffirm the indigenous peoples right to life, physical integrity and security;
2. That the Working Group on Indigenous Populations make a note in its report to the Sub-Commission about the continuing genocide of indigenous peoples throughout the world and the present situation faced by the Igorot people in the Philippines;
3. That this working group address as a matter of urgency the development of standards for the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples.