



**Presentation to the Meeting of the Working Group
on Indigenous Population(WGIP)
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Warmest greetings to the Chairperson, members of the Working Group, and to everyone.

Let me first express the gratitude of Cordillera Peoples Alliance to the Working Group and to the Commission on Human Rights for calling the attention of the Philippine Human Rights Commission on the raid our office, which I reported here last year. Unfortunately, the investigation has been stalled and no further action was taken by the Philippine government.

Once again, allow me to highlight our major concerns as indigenous peoples from the Cordillera, Philippines, particularly on ^{land} related issues.

Despite the Filipino people's victory in ousting a corrupt President, our new President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has yet to come out with clear policy guidelines on the recognition of our ancestral land rights.

While we have a Law called the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act, which encompass the recognition of our ancestral land rights, this has not in any way upheld the traditional ownership of land, which is commonly accepted and recognized by the indigenous peoples. In fact, this law seeks to legitimize the geo-political boundaries set by the government in indigenous peoples' territories through the earlier issuance of what is known as Certificates of Ancestral Land Claim or Domain Claims. As a result of this imposition, boundary conflicts and resource- competition have emerged. This law also seeks to limit the scope of control of indigenous peoples over their land and resources. At the same time, the requirement for the Free, Prior and Informed Consent of indigenous peoples on projects affecting them, is violated with impunity.

While the new President claims to have the concerns of indigenous peoples in her heart, she has not made any decisive steps in protecting our land from plunder and exploitation. Our ancestral homeland as Igorots is the Cordillera Region. We have defended our land against the onslaught of both colonizers and oppressive Philippine states for centuries. Today, our land and resources remain threatened with the ongoing and planned destruction.

Large-scale mining operations all over the Cordillera will be exacerbated, if the Mining Act of 1995 continues to be implemented by the new administration. In fact, President Macapagal admitted that there is growing pressure from multinational mining companies for the immediate approval of their mining applications. As of February 2001, the total approved land area for mining activities is 15,200 hectares in Benguet and Abra while a total land area of 711,000 hectares remains covered with mining applications, mostly by multinational mining companies. Two of the country's biggest mining companies, Lepanto Consolidated Mining Company and Philex Mining Corporation, have refused to compensate victims of disasters caused by their mining activities. These two mining corporations have blatantly violated the rights of workers and affected indigenous communities, especially in their expansion areas.

Another government initiative that threatens the land of indigenous Filipinos is the recent approval of the Power Sector Reform Act for the privatization of the Philippine Energy

Industry. This Act sets into motion the construction of four other mega-dams in the Cordillera once agreements with foreign funders and constructors are signed. These are the Matuno Dam in Ifugao, the Iteb and Binongan Dams in Abra, and the Siffu Dam in Mountain Province. Worse, our new government backed the ongoing construction of the San Roque Dam despite the overwhelming evidence that this project will result in the inundation of the ancestral land of around 16,000 Ibalois and Kankanaeys of Benguet, and to the rest of affected farming communities.

In addition to resource- extractive projects is the segregation of parts of our ancestral land for eco-tourism or commercial tourism. Certain prohibition on the utilization and management of these lands are being imposed on us, while at the same time, we are being asked to commodify our culture to boost the tourism industry. Projects and programs on tourism are ~~not planned and implemented~~ are being carried out at the expense of our people.

Pursuing these energy, mining and eco-tourism projects constitutes an outright violation of our ancestral land rights and will not lead to the development of our people. Our past experience and our present condition demonstrate that as a people, we are being disenfranchised and dislocated from our land. Our existence is being considered as simply coincidental. Aside from losing our source of livelihood, we are made to suffer from environmental destruction and disasters. Once these destructive and exploitative projects are implemented, our life as indigenous peoples, in oneness with our land and resources will be destroyed, leading to ethnocide.

We do not want this to happen. We will continue to assert our ancestral land rights to the very end. We therefore appeal to the Working Group, and all other concerned International Bodies to immediately call the attention of our new government to recognize our rights over our land and resources, not only in paper or through lip service, but also by concrete action. Likewise, we ask for international support to lobby against the entry and exploitation of our land by multinational companies, who are mainly interested in profit at our expense. Concretely, we appeal to those concerned to adopt and implement the recommendation of the World Commission on Dams, especially in recognizing the right of indigenous peoples over water and energy development, as this cannot be separated from our ancestral land rights.

We further recommend that a Workshop on Indigenous Peoples and Eco-tourism be sponsored by the United Nations in order to highlight the concerns of indigenous peoples in relation to Ecotourism. The year 2002 had been declared as the International Year of Eco-tourism and indigenous peoples have not been consulted nor involved in this process.

Finally, we will continue to strengthen and broaden our movement in defense of our land, our life and our resources.

Thank you and good day!