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Fellow indigenous delegates, members of non-government organizations, members of the working group, Madam Chair person; I greet you all in the name of my organization, the Cordillera Peoples Alliance.

The Cordillera Peoples Alliance is a federation of indigenous peoples organisations in the central mountain region of northern Luzon, Philippines. The CPA was established in 1984 as an expression of the unity of the indigenous peoples of the Cordillera in the defense of our ancestral domain and in pursuit of our rights to self-determination. CPA's membership includes community organisations, elders, workers, women, youth, students, urban communities, human rights and church organisations.

The indigenous peoples of the Cordillera are the Ibaloi, Ifugao, Bontoc, Kanakanaey, Kalinga, Isneg and Tinggians, also collectively known as the Igorots.

In our statement this year, we wish to highlight the all-round pressures faced by our peoples, which combine to destroy our very existence and identities. In highlighting the urgency of the situation, we are not submitting a complaint, but merely want to highlight the importance of agreeing to the strongest possible Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adequate to address the serious problems we face in our communities.

Let me start by recalling a tragic incident that happened on February 23 this year, in Mountain Province, which is my home. A young indigenous human rights worker, Cristopher Batan, while on his way to document human rights abuses was shot and killed by members of the Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU). The CAFGU is a government-funded and trained para-military force notorious for its record of human rights violations. Many human rights organizations and advocates, including many members of the Philippine Congress have called for these para-military forces to be disbanded.

The case of Cristopher Batan was dismissed by the military and the media as nothing but the result of an inter-tribal conflict. But the vigilance of our leaders and human rights organisations has resulted in a criminal case being filed against the perpetrators. And continuing vigilance will be needed. Until today, there has been no redress or action on earlier murders of indigenous leaders.

killed in previous years.

This illustrates the necessity and relevance of Article 10 of the Draft Declaration. There is renewed vigour in the Philippine military to recruit indigenous youth into the paramilitary forces in order to use them against other indigenous peoples. This forced recruitment is destroying the unity within communities. Youths who are forced or coerced into joining the CAFGU are scorned and mistrusted by community members; on the other hand, communities which cannot fill up the quota of CAFGU members are subjected to military reprisals on suspicion that these communities are anti-government. There are also cases wherein violent confrontations between peoples are instigated because of the presence of the armed forces.

I now want to highlight another problem. With the programme of the government to achieve "Newly industrialized country" or "NIC" status by the year 2000, our conditions are likely to deteriorate. In order to make this program a reality, the Philippine government has to build energy plants in indigenous territories. At present, there are plans to build 17 mini and 4 mega hydro-electric dams in the Cordillera. We are also witnessing the entry of a big number of transnational corporations in our territories, which are blatantly violating Philippine environmental laws in their operations. For example, in the mining industry, companies are

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shifting from underground mining to open-cast mining in order to cut down on production costs. Despite horrendous environmental damage caused in our communities, which were highlighted in the International Water Tribunal held in the Netherlands last year, the Philippine government has extended the permits of these mining companies to operate.

The present militarized state of our homelands, wherein 5 battalions of the army are deployed, in addition to the paramilitary and police forces, is a clear indication of the seriousness of transnational corporations to exploit the Cordillera resources at any cost. Exploitative activities, such as logging in our territories are preceded and accompanied by fullscale military operations. In the forested Marag valley, for example, after months of relentless military operations, the Isnogs were forced to evacuate their villages and seek shelter in the towns. Within the past year, Marag Valley has become a logging community wherein full-scale logging operations are going on. Thus the Isnogs are without homes or communities to speak of, while the logging company, protected by the military, is wreaking destruction on the ancestral homelands of the Isnogs.

There are also communities which have been turned into hamlets or virtual prisons for the people. The activities of the people are severely restricted by military regulations, such as curfews. In the Mountain Province, where the lands of the Bontoc and Kankanaey peoples are located some distance from the villages, the curfew hours have disrupted the entire agricultural cycle. People are not allowed to stay very long away from the villages, which limits the time that farmers can work in their fields. In small-scale agricultural communities such as ours, this can prove disastrous. Hunger can result from the abandonment of even small ricefields. There are already communities facing this problem.

Despite the pronouncements of the Philippine government about recognising the rights of indigenous peoples, we have not felt positive developments. On the basic issue of representation in government, all Philippine indigenous peoples are affronted by the appointment of a non-indigenous person as our sectoral representative of indigenous peoples in the Philippine Congress. This person, is also a known advocate for development projects which are destructive of indigenous territories.

In drafting of an Organic Act which will provide autonomy for the Cordillera region, again the indigenous peoples are left out. In the desire of the government to speed up the drafting and adoption of an autonomy law, its drafting has been entrusted only to the governors of the Cordillera provinces, excluding the indigenous peoples for whom the law is addressed.

While we face marginalisation in government affairs, the indigenous peoples movement in the Cordillera is achieving victories in the field of education of our peoples on our rights, in developing small-scale economic activities and in building solidarity linkages with other indigenous peoples. We have reached out to our indigenous sisters in Asia by hosting the First Asian Indigenous Womens Conference in January this year. This was one of our major undertakings, which brought together Asian indigenous women to plan joint activities. Our sister from Taiwan will present a more detailed report on this conference.

We attach great importance to the growing linkages among indigenous peoples throughout the world. This year, we are undertaking in our communities, an educational programme among our people about the situations of other indigenous peoples around the world. It is our belief that it is only through understanding the issues and conditions of other indigenous peoples, that we can develop and build fruitful and lasting relations. And it is through the building of such relationships that we, indigenous peoples can be empowered to gain the recognition of indigenous peoples rights worldwide.

Let me end by once again extending an invitation from the Cordillera Peoples Alliance to other indigenous peoples and all peoples to visit us in our homelands. Thank you.