

STATEMENT OF THE DELEGATION FROM THE PHILIPPINE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S ORGANIZATIONS AT THE 1987 MEETING OF THE UNITED NATIONS WORKING GROUP ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

Introduction

We represent the Cordillera People's Alliance and the LUMAD of Mindanao, Philippines. We are also members of the Consultative Assembly of Minority Peoples of the Philippines composed of 214 member organizations.

Through our people's organizations we participated in the anti-dictatorship struggle which toppled the Marcos dictatorship last February, 1986. The 14-years of struggle against the dictator was paid with a high price in terms of lives lost, communities uprooted, massacres and rape. We are happy that the United Nations Commission for Human Rights saw the legitimacy of our complaints and placed the Marcos government under investigation. We strongly feel that our submissions to the Working Group since 1981 helped in the international isolation of the dictator.

We were one with the entire Filipino people in the 14 years of struggle and in celebrating our victory. We were excited with the possibilities of the post-Marcos era where our rights to self-determination will be respected.

No doubt, many of you will conclude that we now have popular democracy, justice and peace. How we wish this were so.

But we came here to deliver a sad message - we the indigenous peoples of the Philippines are in no better situation. In fact, our suffering is getting worst.

Continuing Military Operations Resulting in Murders and Displacement

In January 1986, barely a month before the February revolution, the Philippine military launched OPLAN PEGASUS, a military campaign to encircle and wipe out the insurgent forces in the north. In May 1986, the so-called New Armed Forces of the Philippines under President Aquino resumed the punitive action on a larger scale than even under Marcos.

The new scheme has expanded military operations in many ways. More indigenous provinces were included. War equipment with far greater destructive capacity are now being used by more than 8,500 troops.

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This systematic counter-insurgency operation resulted in more than 100 houses burned, 50 people massacred, 25 people summarily executed, one million pesos worth of properties destroyed and 25,000 people rendered homeless.

I wish to submit to this body for its information, a report of three fact-finding missions to the lower Kalinga-Apayao area of the Cordillera region, which documents all these human rights abuses.

Meanwhile, in the southern island of Mindanao, more than 15 officially sanctioned armed anti-communist vigilantes are causing much sufferings among the indigenous communities. We are being forced to join these vigilantes to take part in an anti-communist crusade.

We wish to reiterate that as it was during the Marcos dictatorship, the issue is not democracy versus communism. Our problems are food and freedom, jobs and justice, protection of our ancestral domains and the recognition of our right to self-determination.

New Constitution Discriminates against Indigenous Peoples

While the newly ratified constitution provides for the establishment of autonomous regions of the Muslims in Mindanao and the Igorots of the Cordillera, there are contradictory provisions. To cite an example, we have Article XII, Section 5, which says:

"The state, subject to the provisions of this Constitution and national development policies and programs, shall protect the rights of indigenous cultural communities to their ancestral lands to ensure their economic, social and cultural well-being".

Unfortunately, the National Development Plan for the next five years is designed by the International Monetary Fund to ensure the repayment of the huge \$27.8 billion foreign debt. The implications, just like in any debtor country are indeed staggering. Specifically, for our indigenous peoples it means:

1. Lesser state allocation for our basic human needs. More than 70% of our people live below the poverty line. We therefore expect this to increase;
2. More of our ancestral lands will be forcibly opened for plunder by transnational agro-business leading to more displacements and landgrabbing;
3. More repression to bring about political stability which is a precondition for more investments and loans.

Furthermore, the new Constitution institutionalized private ownership of property which contradicts our concepts and customary laws.

Non-participation of the Indigenous peoples in decision-making

Last July 15, President Aquino signed Executive Order 220 creating a Cordillera Administrative Region. Sadly, the Executive Order did not have the benefit of a broad democratic debate. It is now causing divisions and tensions in our Cordillera communities.

Our right to participate in determining our economic plans are likewise violated. Shortly after President Aquino assumed office, the European Economic Community (EEC) granted a \$20 million "goodwill" development package called the Central Cordillera Agricultural Project (CECAP). We were not consulted. It was only after a vigorous, expensive and time-consuming lobby work that our right to be consulted was recognized.

Madame chairperson and members of the Working Group, the plague of militarization, discrimination, poverty and landgrabbing continues, increasing our agony. For this reason we have submitted to an European government our opposition to its nomination of President Aquino for the Nobel Peace Prize Award. We are now organizing an international campaign to support our opposition.

Our Commitments and Appeal

On the other hand, we will work hard to have the Philippine government ratify ILO Convention 107. We will mobilize our organizations and allies to actively participate in the revision of this Convention. We will disseminate the wise decisions and insights of the Working Group, the other UN agencies and the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues. Based on our capacities, we will share whatever human and material resources we have with our brothers and sisters in the struggle.

In the spirit of solidarity, we wish to take this opportunity to invite members of the Working Group to be with us during the launching congress of the National Coalition of Philippine Indigenous People's Organizations and Communities, December 6-9, of this year. A month earlier, we will host the assembly of the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific.

We have one special appeal for the Working Group. Please consider for our sake and the future generations the first recommendation for immediate action of the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues, which says:

" Recourse procedures must be established within the United Nations to examine threats to the well-being and survival of the indigenous peoples. An inter-national ombudsman, under the UN aegis could help monitor such situations and report to the General Assembly and the Secretary-General all crisis situations affecting indigenous peoples such as armed conflicts, forced relocations, ethnocide and genocide."

For what is the use of having good international standards years from now, if we no longer exist? What is the reason for " harvesting the grass when the horse is already dead"?

Finally, Madame chairperson, allow us to express our deepest confidence in you and the Working Group, our faith in the future and our victory - in our own way.

(A short chanting follows).

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