

PRESENTATION OF THE LUMAD MINDANAW PEOPLES FEDERATION
ON THE ITEM NUMBER FIVE OF THE UNITED NATION WORKING GROUP ON THE
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES 11TH SESSION
JULY 28, 1993
GENEVA

Madam Chairperson,

In behalf of the Council of Representatives of the Lumad, Peoples Federation, I would like to express my appreciation to the efforts of the members of the working group to facilitate for the drafting of the declaration of the rights of the indigenous peoples. I would like also to express my gratitude to madam chairperson, for providing equal and democratic opportunity with the government representatives. Indigenous peoples in the Philippines have had a very rare opportunity to speak out and be heard with equal honor and dignity, especially when we speak to the so called scientific experts in the government.

Likewise am expressing my warm greetings of solidarity to all indigenous peoples representatives, especially for those who have the privilege to attend the last 10 sessions. I believed that it is because of the persistent assertion of the indigenous peoples organizations that the present draft was made relevant to the situation of the indigenous peoples in the Philippines.

I am convinced that the draft declaration if passed and approved as it appears today, by the proper bodies in the United Nations system, can greatly help the Philippine government to understand and recognize the rights of the indigenous peoples.

The colonial tradition of the Philippine government contributed so much to the distorted understanding of the government system as to real identity of the indigenous peoples. This lack of understanding on the part of the government is manifested on the subsequent government agencies established for the indigenous peoples. It started with the establishment of the Commission for National Integration. This particular institution was designed for the assimilation of the indigenous peoples to the mainstream of the Philippine society. The concept of being national minorities and cultural communities became synonymous with the identity of the indigenous peoples in the Philippines. It has the implication that indigenous peoples belong to the past.

Through this government agencies, indigenous peoples are repeatedly told that they are backward. This kind of outlook provided them the sense of authority to impose their own understanding of what is right for the indigenous peoples. They have determined the direction of our lives and our ancestral lands up to the present level wherein most of our people are already pushed to sub-human living condition.

Under this prevailing circumstances, we respectfully bring the attention of the working group to some of the recent developments of the relationships of indigenous peoples and the government. This is not to complain but rather to give emphasis on the reality that Philippine government do not recognize indigenous

peoples right to ancestral domain and inherent right to self-determination.

Our organization is extremely worried with the continuing activity of the government owned Philippine National Oil Company, in its operation for the establishment of the Geothermal Project at the sacred grounds of Apo Sandawa (Mt. Apo). Through the Council of Elders of the nine tribes in Southern Mindanao, we had conducted the rites of D'yandi for the protection of Apo Sandawa. D'yandi is a traditional rites of the Lumad peoples pact of unity. *Our non-negotiable stand against the degradation of Apo Sandawa is final through the rights of D'yandi. We will die if we allow this project to continue* For almost 8 years now, the government continue to disregard the legitimate demand of the Lumad peoples for the government to respect lumad peoples right to ancestral lands. For two occasions in the previous years our organization sent elders delegation to Manila asking for the complete termination of the project. We have sent petitions, resolutions and have marched in the streets. Leaders of our peoples organization have experienced harassment and intimidations. Since the start of the project, two tribesmen had been killed in the project site.

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Intensive militarization within and around the Mt. Apo National Park has caused massive displacement of Lumad peoples. For most of the time displaced families could not be provided by the government enough food and medicines.

In the southernmost part of the island of Mindanaw, in the province of Maguindanao and Sultan Kudarat, hundreds of families and communities of the Dulangan, Teduray and Lambangian peoples were displaced by industrial tree plantation. This particular peoples were prohibited by company guards of the Consunji Logging Company. Many lives have been lost, especially the elderly and infants as a consequence of displacement.

Our organization had been working for the resolution of long standing problems of the Lumad peoples and their ancestral domain. *The progress of our organization is quite slow for government officials (CARO) are trying to organize use other tribes to defend their interest* Some of our communities through their village based organizations expressed their determination to assert their rights to ancestral land. The B'laan and T'boli peoples in municipality of Banga, South Cotabato re-occupied their ancestral land which was turned into cattle ranch by a big land lord. The said area was barrowed from their elders through promises which was never fulfilled. They have asked for the return of the land and after so many years of waiting, they decided to cultivate the said area. A case was filed in the court ~~was~~ against them. Last year two of their leaders were picked up by the military and were never seen again.

The Aroman Manobo people of Cotabato also re-occupied part of their ancestral land which was borrowed by the Department of Agriculture from their elders during the year 1939. They promised to returned back the land after 25 years along with many promises for development. But again this land was never returned. Through the village organization, they initiated ancestral re-occupation.

In most of this cases, land ownership of the indigenous peoples is considered illegal in the Philippine government. There is no law in the Philippine government that deals on the recognition of the rights of the indigenous peoples to their ancestral lands.

Our organization, the Lumad Mindanaw Peoples Federation, firmly believed that the real development of the indigenous peoples will be achieved through their own exercise of self-determination. We are asking for the due recognition and respect of our legitimate collective right to our ancestral domain and self determination. ~~We hope for the approval of the draft declaration to help the Philippine government understand our struggle for survival as distinct people.~~