



CORDILLERA PEOPLES ALLIANCE

For the Defense of the Ancestral Domain and for Self Determination

Cordillera Day 2013 (29th Cordillera Day) Central Statement: Assert Our Right to Self Determination and the Politics of Change

Everyday, we suffer the worsening economic crisis in the Cordillera region and in the whole country. Our families face food insecurity daily due to low agricultural production but costly inputs, minimum incomes, high cost of living and widespread unemployment in rural and urban communities. Many of us move to the cities in search for jobs, but end up jobless, landless and homeless. We fall into indebtedness and bankruptcy forcing us to become migrant workers overseas, far from hearth and home. The proffered solution by the Aquino government is the conditional Cash Transfer known as Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps). The 4Ps may give minimal immediate financial relief for a few needy families, but this is nothing more than a palliative dole-out measure that creates a culture of dependence and is unsustainable, being dependent on World Bank loans.

We are alarmed at how foreign and local capitalists freely plunder our natural resources. In the Cordillera, 2 giant mining corporations, Philex and Lepanto, have been operating now for several decades exhausting the gold, copper and other minerals in our mountains. Numerous other foreign companies have applications to mine over 60% of the region's land area. In addition, several energy projects – hydropower dams and geothermal – are planned to be constructed all over the region, without the free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) of the affected communities and with dubious benefits for the host communities. These extractive industries and projects have resulted in the grabbing of our ancestral lands, facilitated by deceptive and oppressive land laws, including the Regalian doctrine, that designate our ancestral domains as public land.

We empathize with our communities made vulnerable to disasters due to environmental degradation and the climate crisis. The August 2012 Philex tailings dam failure that spilled 20 million metric tons of toxic chemicals and silt into the Agno River is just the latest in a series of disasters brought on by destructive mining operations. Other communities have been victims to landslides, floods, drought and super typhoons, which have aggravated the already degraded environment due to extractive industries. The indiscriminate cutting of trees, irresponsible waste disposal and the lack of any comprehensive land use plan or environmental management plan highlight the situation of disaster vulnerability of our communities and the inadequate government preparedness, response and support for the victims.

We are disgusted at the neglect and irresponsibility of our government officials over the welfare of our people. Incumbent officials pay little heed to the dire lack of basic social services such as clean water supply, health and education services and facilities, especially in remote communities. The privatization of government health services such as the corporatization of the Baguio General Hospital and Medical Center is another blow against the poor cash-strapped families seeking free or affordable medical care. In contrast, we are scandalized by the blatant incidents of graft and corruption, e.g., road construction being used as a milking cow for election campaign funds and the free use of political position to broker favors for personal gain.

We deplore patronage politics and misrepresentation by corrupt traditional politicians. For too long, we have been ruled by political dynasties who hog political power for their own self-enrichment and aggrandizement. Traditional politicians resort to vote-buying, electoral fraud, threats and private armed groups to ensure they win in the elections. Meanwhile, our indigenous socio-political institutions and traditional democratic systems of leadership have neither recognition nor pride of place in the government bureaucracy. They are merely used to prop up the campaign and rhetoric for bogus regional autonomy.

We condemn militarization and human rights violations. Military operations usually accompany the entry of extractive industries and destructive projects in our communities as part of the Aquino government's Oplan Bayanihan. Military troops use day care centers, schools, barangay halls and other spaces as camps, disrupting community life and bringing fear where we should feel safe. Public schools are illegally used by the military for indoctrination and political vilification against people's organizations, indigenous leaders and activists. There have been cases of illegal arrest and detention, and still unsolved cases of extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearance. A culture of impunity prevails among the ranks of State security forces, who continue to commit human rights violations.

WHAT CHANGES DO WE NEED?

It is high time for us to experience genuine changes in our situation. Promises have been made but have been broken repeatedly. What we need are real changes to improve the conditions we face in our communities, in the region and in the country. We deserve better and have the right to the following changes:

Recognition of indigenous peoples rights including the right to ancestral lands, territories and resources, to practice and develop our indigenous culture and customary laws, to be consulted and to give free prior and informed consent before any development in our communities, and the right to self-determine our own development priorities based on our own needs and aspirations.

Honest, responsive and responsible leaders in government. We deserve good governance and pro-people leaders who perform according to their mandate of service to the people.

Respect for democratic rights and freedoms of oppressed and exploited people.

We reserve our basic rights to livelihood and employment, humane working conditions, fair wages and benefits, equitable trade relations, freedom of organization, association, religion and other civil and political rights as well as our basic economic, social and cultural rights.

Freedom from the dictates of foreign interests. We need genuine, pro-people development defined by the people's needs and priorities for food self-sufficiency, food sovereignty and national industrialization, free from foreign impositions and interference. What we ultimately need is a change in the social system into a truly democratic and sovereign Filipino nation.

WHAT SHOULD WE, THE CORDILLERA PEOPLE, DO?

1. **Make your vote count in the May 2013 elections.** Out with the old, in with the new politics of change! Vote KATRIBU Indigenous Peoples Partylist! Vote Teddy Casiño for senator! Support other pro-people candidates running for senate, congress, provincial and city government positions.
2. **Educate friends, relatives, classmates, co-workers and communities on the politics of change.** We need to get involved and engage in political advocacy for change. Social awareness is necessary for us to understand the need for change.
3. **Uphold People Power.** Strengthen our people's organizations. Engage in collective actions for change at the local, national and international levels. Nothing will change if we do not get involved and act now!

4. **Advance the Cordillera peoples' movement for the defense of ancestral domain and for self-determination.** Reach out to all communities in the Cordillera region to build and strengthen the region-wide mass movement. Unite and fight for our rights.
5. **Unite with other Filipinos for national democracy.** Join hands with the peasants, workers, youth, professionals, migrants and other democratic sectors who are also clamoring for social change.

LET CORDILLERA DAY 2013 BE A CATALYST FOR THE POLITICS OF CHANGE

Thirty-two years after the death of Macliing Dulag, on the occasion of Cordillera Day 2013, we affirm our commitment to the politics of change and assert our right to national sovereignty, democracy and self-determination. Today, we raise our fists and join hands in our resolve to continue the noble struggle started by our ancestors in `defense of our ancestral lands and our right to self-determination. We will participate in whatever way we can in the Cordillera peoples' movement until we realize genuine and lasting change for ourselves and for our future generations.

“For us, our strength comes from our ancestors, our determination to succeed from our children, and our success from our unity.”

Cordillera Peoples Alliance
April 24, 2013