



CORDILLERA PEOPLES ALLIANCE

For the Defense of the Ancestral Domain and for Self Determination

December 10, 2009

CPA Garners Gawad Bayani ng Kalikasan Award



BAGUIO CITY—The Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) is an awardee in the organization category of the Center for Environmental Concerns (CEC)- Philippines' *Gawad Bayani ng Kalikasan: Parangal sa Magiting na Pakikibaka para sa Kalikasan at Karapatan*, whose awarding ceremonies takes place today in Quezon City. This is the second award the Alliance has received this year after the international award *Women's World Summit Foundation's (WSSF) Laureate Prize for Rural Women* given to CPA pioneer Mother Petra Macliing of Mainit, Bontoc, Mt. Province and awarded last November 8 during the 10th CPA Regional Congress.

The Gawad Bayani ng Kalikasan recognizes “ordinary individuals and organizations that have selflessly spearheaded environmental struggles and protection of basic rights. CEC says the project hopes to promote environmental conservation, goodwill and love of country. The CEC is a non-government organization founded in 1989 which works closely with communities and organizations nationwide, supporting their initiatives to nurture their ecosystems, defend their common access to natural resources, and eventually improve their living and working

conditions in the context of a balanced and healthy environment. CEC advocates for people-oriented, patriotic, sustainable, and scientific policies and programs for the protection of the Philippine environment and engages in information sharing, networking, cross-cultural exchanges, and solidarity initiatives on common environmental issues and concerns at the international level. Some of CEC's partners include the Keidanren Nature Conservation Fund, Ford Foundation, Interchurch Organization for Development and Cooperation and DVV International.

Contribution to Environmental Defense and People's Welfare

As a recipient of this award, the CPA is recognized as a “model and source of inspiration locally and in the international indigenous peoples' movement for its consistent and persistent advancement of indigenous peoples' rights linked with defense, nurture and management of the ancestral domain and resources for `welfare of present and future generations.”

Since its establishment in 1984, CPA's unwavering pro-people stand on national patrimony and environmental nurture can be seen in its Defense of Land, Life and Resources campaign, which highlights indigenous peoples' inherent relationship with the environment. Highlight campaigns include the Chico Dams and San Roque Dam struggles. The successful opposition to the Chico Dams (Mt. Province and Kalinga) and Cellophil Resources Corporation (Abra) in the early 1980s is integral to the early beginnings of the CPA. To date, the Chico River flows freely, and villages remain vigilant over new attempts to dam the mighty river. On the other hand, even if the San Roque Dam continued to be built, the campaign generated awareness from local to international arena on the social, environmental destruction caused by

mega dams. Some gains were attained for the affected communities, and to date, the issue of the San Roque Dam is not yet closed. The video documentary *Agno*, produced by CPA and Southern Tagalog Exposure narrates this experience and the gains and lessons of this campaign.

In the 1990's, CPA led and supported the campaign against the open pit mines in Itogon, Benguet which led to the closure of Benguet Corporation's open pit mines. Another focused campaign against large mining was with the Save the Abra river Movement (STARM) which was carried out with the broad support of the academe, scientists, Church, local government officials and students. The campaign exposed the destruction caused by the Lepanto Consolidated Mining Company (LCMCo) to the Abra River ecosystem, and on the health and livelihood of villages living along it. The results of this campaign generated widespread coverage in the media at the local, national and international levels. CPA and the Center for Development Programs in the Cordillera (CDPC), its NGO partner, also embarked on a joint advocacy program on the Cordillera Environment and Climate Change, starting in 2008.

To help improve marginalized peoples' welfare and living conditions, CPA with its NGO partners ran programs projects, such as the following: People's Marketing Center (1985-1992), model appropriate technology such as the water powered rice pounder which was later destroyed by the terrorist Cordillera Peoples Liberation Army (CPLA). This was a breakthrough project with member organizations, showing that electricity in far-flung villages can be generated even without mega-dams. Other projects include the West Kalinga Integrated Area Development Project in the 1990s which envisions comprehensive development of agro-forestry, handicrafts, small-scale mining, basic infrastructure, education, health and other basic social services. Joint efforts with CDPC are continuing on the programs of sustainable agriculture, food security to raise and diversify food production and promote organic farming, appropriate technology in support of agriculture and food processing, and disaster response and readiness.

Gains for the Cordillera peoples

These programs and projects are only highlights of CPA's 25 years of advocacy for indigenous peoples' right to ancestral land and self determination. We can say that 25 years of painstaking work, inspite of persistent attacks of State terrorism, resulted to broader awareness of indigenous peoples' rights not only locally but internationally. Local communities are more empowered to act on issues affecting them, these be large mining and dams, control of resources, boundary disputes, oppressive government laws and policies, militarization and human rights violations, indigenous socio-political systems, discrimination against indigenous peoples and other forms of national oppression. CPA's gains have definitely affected the socio-economic, cultural, and political landscape of the Cordillera, for the peoples' benefit. Instead of hopelessness and indifference, CPA's consciousness and resolve prevailed to see what can be done. These gains now have to be nurtured and sustained with continuing education, organizing and campaigns, also to cope with new challenges and developments.

By its concrete gains and widespread campaigns from local to international levels, CPA contributed to the integrated struggle for the environment and genuine development, people's rights especially indigenous people's rights, and national patrimony for people's welfare. Destructive mega dams and large scale mining projects were stopped. Its organizing and campaigns empowered communities and sectors to act on their own issues and achieve results, even at much sacrifice including martyrdom of some of its leaders. The gains give hope that situations of discrimination against indigenous peoples, and overwhelming development aggression of destructive large scale mining and mega dams can change and be dealt with for the people's benefit; if they are aroused and organized to act on their issues. #