



CORDILLERA PEOPLES ALLIANCE

For the Defense of the Ancestral Domain and for Self Determination

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PRESS RELEASE

CPA Pioneer Receives International Recognition for Protection of Indigenous Rights, Ancestral Land, and Culture

BAGUIO CITY (October 5)—Cordillera Peoples Alliance founding member and pioneer Mother Petra Macliing, was chosen as one of the awardees of Women's World Summit Foundation's (WSSF) Laureate Prize for Rural Women for the year 2009. Mother Petra's invaluable and historic contribution for the protection of indigenous rights to self determination and ancestral land was distinctly recognized alongside the efforts and contributions of the other 9 awardees worldwide. Mother Petra hails from Mainit, Bontoc, Mountain Province and continues to share her leadership and wisdom in the Cordillera people's struggle for self determination as a member of CPA's Advisory Council. A living indigenous woman icon for her lifetime of activism for the Cordillera indigenous peoples, she is also a founding member of the Kalinga-Bontoc Peace Pact Holders Association (KBPPHA).



The WSSF Laureate Award honors creative and courageous women and women's groups worldwide for their contribution in improving the quality of life in rural communities, for protecting the environment, transmitting knowledge and standing up for human rights and peace. Established in 1994, WSSF has so far awarded 354 prizes in more than 100 countries. The WSSF is a humanitarian, non-government, non-profit and international organization with United Nations consultative status which works for a new development paradigm with and for women and children. It was established in March 8, 1991 in Geneva, on the occasion of International Working Women's Day.

Honor, Courage and Determination

“It is a great honor for the Cordillera Peoples Alliance, in the person of Mother Petra Macliing, to be given such recognition in the field of protecting and promoting indigenous peoples' ancestral land rights. We are at the same time honored for the recognition given to indigenous women in this arena”, said Jill Cariño, CPA Vice Chairperson for External Affairs, adding that Mother Petra has never wavered in her understanding that the identity and life of indigenous peoples is intrinsically tied to the protection and conservation of the land. Given the honorific title of ‘Mother’ by her tribe, she is a living representation of the role of how rural women protect land and culture.

Mother Petra's leadership and courage started in her *ili's (home village)* active participation in the successful opposition to the World Bank-funded Chico Dams struggle in the late 1970's, which was also the period of Martial Law. “We forged solidarity with the women of Kalinga. We spoke in mass mobilizations here in Mountain Province, and relate the Mainit mining issue with the Cellophil

Resources opposition in Abra. We shared experiences in our struggle, especially with the Butbut tribe and women of Bugnay,” recalls Mother Petra

Mother Petra recounts in an earlier interview, “ Martial Law was evident with the heavy military deployment, both in Mountain Province and Kalinga, especially in Bugnay. I was a marked individual, of course, being responsible for organizing the women in my *ili*. The military, the government called us communists. Once, I went to the barracks in Bontoc to talk to the soldiers. Most of them were young. I told them to leave us to tend our ricefields—‘You work to feed yourselves, we work to feed our families, leave us.’

She also shared how the women of Mainit joined hands to drive away the prospectors of Benguet Corporation (BC), who were exploring Mainit in the mid-1970s. She recalls a particular incident, “There were some 200 of us men and women from Mainit who confronted the BC prospectors. The men immediately wanted to physically assault the company’s camp, and this would have been violent. This is one reason why the women took the lead, with the men not far behind. We were not armed, yes, but we had other means. Arms linked, we told the prospectors to leave our land. We were only women, but our anger and rage at that moment gave us the strength we did not think we had.

She continues, “We burned the campsite and threw their equipment downstream. The second time, we took with us the equipment we could carry and brought it to their office at Bontoc Poblacion so they would leave our mountains forever. Disrobing by older indigenous women to curse, shame and drive them away was exercised at that time. We were so determined to drive the prospectors away, we also grabbed and squeezed their groins to their pain and agony. And so they left.”

Widowed, and the literal mother of 7 children, Mother Petra was determined to keep her young family from destitution while preserving her ancestral lands through sustainable farming. Mother Petra became a leader within her rural community on natural farming techniques. Innovatively utilizing rice husks, a traditional waste product and food for edible regional snails, and the waste product from traditional pig farming, Mother Petra was able to naturally fertilize her fields. Slowly, Mother Petra is drawing her neighbors away from chemical fertilizers as they witness the high yields of her rice paddies.

Her being a single parent and the hard life in the rural communities did not hinder her activism for Cordillera indigenous peoples’ rights, which she admirably pursues up to present. Moreover, it strengthened her role as a mother. In fact, she was able to raise all 7 children—all girls— well and they are now professionals, including a doctor, lawyer, an NGO worker and businesswomen. She often recounts to her 24 grandchildren the hardship and success of her younger life for their own reflection. Mother Petra leaves a challenge for today’s youth, gleaning on the lessons and gains from Chico and Celophil—“The youth should be challenged. They should be told the wisdom of our forefathers and be open to new ideas of organizing, militancy and struggle”.

“Mother Petra’s distinct contribution for indigenous peoples rights not only in the Cordillera but also internationally gives us inspiration and resoluteness to carry on CPA’s work to protect and fight for indigenous peoples’ rights”, said Cariño in closing.

CPA likewise extends its congratulations to the other Laureate Awardees who are women leaders from Burkina Faso, Brazil, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, India and Mongolia. #