



CORDILLERA PEOPLES ALLIANCE

For the Defense of the Ancestral Domain and for Self Determination

CORDILLERA DAY 2011 CENTRAL STATEMENT

Biagen ti Nadeggang a Pakasaritaan iti Pannakidangadang! Ilaban ti Daga, Biag ken Dayaw!

Live Out Our Glorious History of Struggle! Fight for Land, Life and Honor!

Countless episodes of valor mark the history of the peoples of the Cordillera. Many of these took place within the setting of the twin struggles that birthed the Cordillera mass movement – that against the Marcos dictatorship’s project to build a series of dams on the Chico river and that against the logging operations of the Cellophil Resources Corporation. In both struggles, the people prevailed against bureaucratic and capitalist cunning as well as state fascism. But it is particularly the anti-Cellophil struggle that we remember and derive inspiration from as we celebrate the 27th Cordillera Day this April 2011 in Buneg, Lacub, Abra.

The Struggle versus Cellophil: a Shining Example of Indigenous Peoples’ Resistance

In 1973, Dictator Ferdinand Marcos awarded Cellophil, a corporation owned by one of his cronies, and its subsidiary, the Cellulose Processing Corporation, Timber and Pulpwood License Agreements that covered 198,795 hectares of forest on the mountains of Abra and adjacent parts of the Mountain Province, Kalinga, Apayao, Ilocos Norte, and Ilocos Sur. The area was occupied by about 145,000 persons, most of them indigenous people. At the same time, the dictatorship forcibly evicted the Ilocano occupants of agricultural land in the lowland Abra towns of Tayum and Dolores, where Cellophil was to build its pulp processing plant.

Anticipating their own eviction, Tinggian leaders in the Abra highlands demanded respect for ancestral land and traditional resource use. With the active participation of parish priests and missionaries belonging to the Roman Catholic Society of the Divine Word (SVD), Tinggian communities geared up for mass struggle. High school, college and seminary students, peasant youth and elders, community women and men organized themselves and launched a protest campaign that was also an assertion of their rights and their identity as Tinggians.

As the campaign intensified, Marcos placed local government in the hands of military officers who were also local warlords. They provided security to Cellophil and actively attempted to quell the snowballing protest. But when Cellophil, escorted by the military, attempted to start logging in the Bangilo district, its entry was blocked by the local people, who demanded that the company respect their ancestral land rights and customary laws.

In September 1978, the Tinggian protest was further solidified with the forging of an inter-tribal *bodong* (peacepact) among the peoples of the municipalities of Malibcong, Bucloc and Tubo. The same year, Tubo peacepact holders hosted an inter-provincial *bodong* conference, which resulted in the signing of a seven-point *pagta ti kalon* (terms of alliance) that bound various tribes in Abra, the Mountain Province and Kalinga to the fight against Cellophil. Thus, the anti-Cellophil struggle developed a broad front that was clearly framed in indigenous peoples’ rights and democratic institutions.

Meanwhile, the Marcos dictatorship went all out in its efforts to suppress the growing mass movement against Cellophil by attempting to discredit the *bodong*, deploying hundreds of troops in Abra, and persecuting activists and community leaders. In spite of these, the Tinggian communities persisted in their struggle, employing a wide range of legal and extralegal means to foil Cellophil’s attempts to log their forests. They blocked company vehicles, destroyed company equipment and even attacked military detachments. Many of them joined the New People’s Army (NPA) and rose to positions of leadership in this revolutionary organization.

The period 1980 to 1986 saw the comprehensive development of the Abra mass movement, from its initial anti-Cellophil orientation to a much wider people’s resistance versus imperialism, fascism and the national oppression of indigenous peoples. This resistance converged with similar streams of mass struggle in other parts of the Cordillera and, ultimately, nationwide, until the Marcos dictatorship finally collapsed. In the process, Cellophil was abandoned.

This brilliant chapter of Cordillera history clearly proved that through determined mass struggle and unity with the rest of the Filipino nation, indigenous peoples could successfully assert their rights and contribute to the wider movement for national freedom and genuine democracy, and for the self-determination of indigenous peoples.

Present Struggles

We regard the successful anti-Cellophil movement as a glorious chapter in history whose invaluable lessons can help steer us through present struggles against continuing and aggravated development aggression and national oppression, state fascism and military terrorism, even under the administration of President Benigno Aquino III.

Like the majority of Filipinos, the majority of people in the Cordillera region suffer worsening poverty and hunger as a result of the acute economic crisis. The cost of petroleum has increased several times already this year, raising the consumer price of diesel to an average of P50/l and gasoline to P65/l, and starting off a chain of price hikes – in transportation, basic commodities and services. Yet wages and salaries have remained low and insufficient for meeting the daily cost of living of Filipino families.

The largest portions of the national budget of P 1.64 trillion have been allotted to debt servicing (P 823.7 billion or 50% of the total budget) and military spending (P104.7B). Pork barrels have increased by more than 100% relative to last year's allocations. With the corruption and plunder scandals hounding the Armed Forces of the Philippines, it would be wiser for government to redirect the military budget to health, social welfare, education, and job generation. The last would help stem the tide of workers and professionals leaving the country – at an estimated rate of 3000/day. It would also help provide employment to the thousands of OFWs who have had to be repatriated from crisis-ridden countries like Libya and joined the ranks of unemployed Filipinos who, as of January 2010, numbered a staggering 2.8 million.

On top of the national crisis that affects them, indigenous peoples have had to contend with increasingly aggressive incursions on their ancestral domains. The Cordillera region remains a favorite target for mining plunder and exploitation. In fact, 247 applications have already been endorsed and approved under the present Aquino regime. The regime has retained five Cordillera locations among its 23 priority mine development sites. Of the Cordillera's total land area of 1.8 million hectares, close to a million are covered by mining tenements. In Abra province alone, 14 Exploration Permit applications and one Financial and Technical Assistance Agreement (FTAA) are currently being processed, while three Mineral Sharing Production Agreements (MPSA) were approved.

The adverse effects of large scale mining are concrete and indisputable. They have resulted in irreparable damage to the natural environment and local agriculture, the economic and even physical displacement of indigenous communities, and the aggravation of climate change impacts.

Apart from mining are projects to tap the Cordillera's energy resources. Five geothermal projects are in the offing: the Acupan and Daclan projects in Benguet, the Buguias-Tinoc project in Benguet and Ifugao, the Mainit-Sadanga project in the Mountain Province and the Kalinga project. The last is the biggest – involving substantial portions of the municipalities of Tinglayan, Pasil, and Lubuagan. It is being undertaken by the global energy giant Chevron.

Across the region, mining and energy companies have violated the right of indigenous communities to self-determination and to free, prior, informed consent (FPIC). We have seen this take place in Benguet (Bakun, Mankayan, Itogon, Bokod), Abra (Baay-Licuan, Lacub), Kalinga (Balbalan, Tabuk, Lubuagan, Tinglayan) and Apayao (Conner) – often with the collusion of officers of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, and sometimes even with the collaboration of local government. The attempts to manipulate FPIC processes have, however, been foiled by the communities' organizations who did not succumb to trickery, bribery, pressure or coercion.

Militarization remains a constant companion to development aggression in the Cordillera, with four regular and three special battalions of the AFP deployed in mining areas within the territories of indigenous peoples. The main units operating in Abra province are the 41st and 50th Infantry Battalions (IB) of the 503rd Brigade, 5th Division, Philippine Army. Also operating here are the 52nd Division Reconnaissance Company (DRC), which is a counter-insurgency strike force, and a company of the 77th IB, which serves as the cadre corps for the paramilitary Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAFGU).

There has been rampant military violation of indigenous peoples' individual and collective rights. From 2001 to 2009, under the regime of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, there were 33 documented cases of extrajudicial killing and enforced disappearance. Under the present Aquino regime, there have as yet been no killings or abductions in the Cordillera. But the persecution and harassment of political activists, development workers and health workers continue; likewise, the military occupation of indigenous peasant villages. GMA's undeclared policy of state terrorism, embodied in Oplan Bantay Laya, has been replaced by PNoy's Oplan Bayanihan. With this, we expect the same military terrorism, albeit under a different name and employing a modified approach.

In our present struggles, we must also continue asserting genuine regional autonomy over government's bogus regional autonomy. Government's present efforts for a third organic act is no different from the first two that were overwhelmingly rejected twice by the Cordillera peoples in two plebiscites.

In Lacub municipality where the 27th Cordillera Day is being celebrated, communities are confronted with both development aggression and warlordism. All Lacub is rich in gold ore deposits. Indigenous and migrant small-scale miners currently operate 14 sites distributed throughout the municipality. The Governor of Abra, and the Mayor and Vice-Mayor of Lacub, have openly expressed their desire to have large mining companies take over the exploitation of Lacub's gold. They have welcomed the entry of Golden Lake Mineral Resources, a new company owned by Miguel M. Peña, scion of a politically powerful *hacienda*-owning clan in the Visayas. Golden Lake, in turn, has put the implementation of its plans in the hands of Philex, an old Benguet-based mining company. A number of other large miners have staked their claims on Lacub – among these the Titan Exploration and Development Corporation.

Golden Lake has dangled promises of infrastructure development to this government-neglected and warlord-controlled municipality, and has even provided high-powered rifles to the private army of the local warlord, Vice-Mayor Leo Baroña, who has at least twice attempted to seize the small mines of his own kindred and neighbors – unsuccessfully. While terroristic in nature and sometimes chilling in effect, local warlordism has not prevented the people of Lacub from asserting their individual and collective human rights.

The people of Lacub have a long history of resistance to oppression. During the time of the Marcos dictatorship, they provided the underground base of the resistance to Cellophil. They also played a central role in the Tinggian struggle against the Binongan dam – which, at first, Marcos, then his cousin, President Fidel Ramos, tried and failed to build. Now, the people of Lacub, organized as the *Timpuyog dagiti Umili iti Lacub, Bantayan Ekolohiya ken Kinabaknang* (TULBEK), are standing up against large mining, warlordism and militarization. Hosting the 27th Cordillera Day is in itself a manifestation of their resoluteness.

Challenges and Our Tasks

With these developments at the national level and in the region, the present Aquino regime has yet to prove the sincerity of its promise of good government. Cordillera peoples have little hope of a let-up in their suffering and struggle. We must, therefore, persist in building a Cordillera mass movement that asserts our peoples' right to ancestral domain and self-determination through genuine regional autonomy. As we resist large-scale capitalist mining, we promote responsible small-scale mining – that which is community-controlled and managed as additional livelihood in accordance with their collective interests and indigenous resource management systems, and using sustainable and viable means of production.

The Cellophil experience informs us that mass struggle, undertaken in unity with the rest of the Filipino people, is crucial to winning any indigenous people's fight for ancestral land and life. It also shows us the important role that our indigenous socio-political institutions can play. Above all, it tells us that there is no force big or strong enough to defeat a people asserting their rights as individual human beings and as communities.

In the historic anti-Cellophil struggle, Lacub and the rest of Abra demonstrated sheer courage and determination. The same courage and determination, sown four decades ago, must be reaped anew and lived out for our present struggles. On Cordillera Day 2011, we will seal our renewed commitment to the defense of ancestral land, life and honor with a Cordillera-wide unity pact on mining and militarization, and by forwarding our concrete issues and demands to the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), in line with the ongoing peace negotiations, particularly on socio-economic reform.

The justness of the Tinggian indigenous peoples' struggle against Cellophil is unquestionable—and so is the present struggle in Abra province against warlordism, militarization, and large-scale capitalist mining. We believe in the justness of this struggle, and with the lessons from our history of successful resistance to national oppression and imperialism, we will persist in fighting for land, life and honor. #

*Cordillera Peoples Alliance
for the Defense of Ancestral Domain and for Self Determination
April 24, 2011*