



CORDILLERA PEOPLES ALLIANCE

For the Defense of the Ancestral Domain and for Self Determination

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Stop the Laiban Dam Construction Before Another Tragedy Happens

Reviving the ill-fated Laiban Dam in Rizal and Quezon Provinces in the Southern Tagalog Region is a tragedy waiting to happen and an outright violation to the collective rights of the Dumagat indigenous peoples.

Let us not forget the dreadful flooding due to the San Roque Dam (SRD) last year that submerged 10 towns in Pangasinan, and parts of Nueva Vizcaya and Tarlac, resulting to at least 700 deaths. Local government's opposition eventually died down, even with the hearing called for by the Senate Committee on Environment where CPA participated and reiterated its call for the decommissioning of the SRD.

The truth is, government has not responded to the public clamor for the decommissioning of the SRD yet it has the temerity to violate more human rights and create a situation that could lead to more loss of lives and properties with the completion of the Laiban dam.

Since our campaign in 1996, the Cordillera Peoples Alliance's (CPA) calls to stop the SRD construction and have it decommissioned was correct from the start, due to its widespread adverse impacts to communities, indigenous and non-indigenous, and the environment. We iterate these as we do not want the same flooding to happen in Rizal and Quezon provinces.

The Laiban Dam

The Laiban Dam was resurrected from the dam projects of the Marcos regime during the Martial Law years. From the start, attempts to build the dam were met with intense opposition. Sustained resistance and lack of funds eventually shelved the project and was only revived as a priority project under the Estrada administration.

The dam project encompasses the barangays of Laiban, Sta. Ines, Sto. Niño, San Andres, Cayabo and Tinukan in Rizal Province and Lumutan in Quezon, covering some 28,000 hectares.

Arroyo ordered the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) to immediately complete the dam construction in a flustered response to the water crisis in Metro Manila. The dam will trap freshwater from the Umiray River in Nakar, Quezon and the surrounding watershed areas. The Metropolitan Water Sewerage System (MWSS) and the San Miguel Corporation (SMC) are now in the process of clinching the Memorandum of Agreement which is set to be sealed this coming March.

Dumagat elders fear that water impounded will submerge the Dumagat villages and eventually dislocate at least 4,000 families. Surveys and reports as early as 2001 show that the Dumagats have disapproved of the dam which will only displace and dispossess them of their ancestral lands, which is the material base of their existence since time immemorial.

Note as well that in this present state of climate crisis, those most at risk are indigenous peoples, with their intrinsic relation to the land for survival. The presence and operation of energy projects in indigenous territories aggravates and hastens the impacts of climate change at the expense of indigenous peoples. This spells twin dangers for the Dumagat if the dam is completely built, and super

typhoons like Ondoy and Pepeng are expected to ensue in the future. The challenge now is for the sourcing out of alternative and sustainable sources of energy, like wind and solar power, again with due respect for indigenous peoples' rights.

Like many indigenous communities, the Dumagat suffer from national oppression, manifested institutionalized discrimination, plunder of the ancestral land militarization, and absence of basic services. Thus, instead of dams or other extractive industries, and the presence of militarization, what should be brought into Dumagat communities are basic social services such as health and education.

In Solidarity

The CPA expresses support and solidarity to the Dumagat on their resistance to Laiban dam, as we remember the anti-Laiban dam activist and Dumagat Nicanor Delos Santos of Rizal province, slain by military elements belonging to Task Force Panther of the 2nd Infantry Division, for his unwavering leadership against the dam and in defense of his people's rights. His legacy was not in vain with the continuing struggle of the Dumagat in defense of their ancestral land. We also challenge the Dumagat people to learn from the Cordillera experience on the successful resistance to the Chico Dams also during martial law, as we remember our own ancestors who fought for our ancestral land in the face of intense militarization, extrajudicial killings, torture, and other demeaning forms of political repression. Their legacy is integral to our identity as a people, and to date, the Chico River runs free.

Thus, more than ever, government must recognize, respect indigenous peoples' rights and acknowledge their time-tested wisdom, before graver human rights violations happen. The Laiban dam construction must be stopped before another tragedy happens.

Also, the tragedy from last year's San Roque Dam flooding is an experience from which lessons must be drawn, as we stress our call for the decommissioning of the SRD, and for those in the National Power Corporation and San Roque Power Corporation to be held accountable. #

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