

## 5th Igorot Cordillera BIMAAK Europe (ICBE) Consultation

Place: Jugendbildungsstätte Sonnenau  
Haus der Schönstatt-Mädchenjugend  
Hillscheider Strasse 7  
56179 Vallendar  
Germany

Date: 10-13 April 2009

Theme: Igorot Cordillera Rituals: Their Features and Significance

Contact Persons: Severino (Rhino) Oblas  
Jane Klee-Morgens  
Mario Guinyawan  
Norma Wellhausen

### The Fifth ICBE Consultation

#### In a Capsule

*Yvonne Belen*

The Igorot Cordillera BIMAAK Europe (ICBE) held its 5th Consultation on April 10-13, 2009 at the Haus Sonnenau in Vallendar, Germany. The theme was "Igorot Cordillera Rituals: Their Features and Significance." Contact persons were: Severino "Rhino" Oblas, Jane Klee-Morgens, Norma Bayoya-Wellhausen, and Mario Guinyawan. There were 82 participants - first, second, and third generation Igorots. The organizations represented were: Igorot Organization Austria (Igorot-Austria), Cordillera Community in Belgium (Cordi-Bel), BIBAK-Ireland, BIBAK-Switzerland, Igorot-UK and Igorot Global Organization (IGO). Other Igorot participants came from Canada, Germany, The Netherlands, Sweden, USA and the Philippines.

The Consultation's main features were:

1. Seminar-workshop on "Photographic Principles that lead to Super Pictures" by Claus Nabert;
2. Keynote address, "Cordillera Rituals: Their Features and Significance" by Dr. Caridad B. Fiar-od, Liaison Officer for International Affairs, Mountain Province, Philippines;
3. Special presentation on "The Bulul in the Social Life of the Ifugao People" by Dr. Serafin L. Nghayon, President, Ifugao State College of Agriculture and Forestry, Ifugao, Philippines;
4. Presentation of skits on the Igorot Cordillera rituals:
  - (a) Mountain Province BEGNAS ceremony by Igorot-UK
  - (b) Abra wedding by Igorots from Germany and The Netherlands
  - (c) Kalinga housewarming by Igorot-Austria
  - (d) Ifugao childbirth rituals by Cordi-Bel
  - (e) Apayao agricultural rituals by BIBAK-Switzerland, and
  - (f) Benguet death rituals by BIBAK-Ireland and Rhino Oblas;

5. Speech of H.E. Ambassador Delia Domingo-Albert, "German Scientific Work in the Cordilleras - a Continuing Challenge," which Mechthild Oblas read because the Ambassador was unable to attend;
6. Comments on the Ambassador's speech by Dr. Serafin L. Ngohayon;
7. Gala Cultural Night coordinated by Norma Bayoya-Wellhausen and Cristabel Bounggick; and
8. Sightseeing tour along the river Rhine with Rhino and Mechthild Oblas as guides.

ICBE published a magazine, "Cordillera Rituals as a Way of Life" as part of the Consultation's Proceedings. The contents are: Cordillera Rituals: Their Features and Significance, Apayao Rituals: Their Features and Significance, Benguet: The *Peg-as* and *Paypay* Rituals by Caridad B. Fiar-od, Ph.D.; Mountain Province BEGNAS Ceremony: Its Meaning and Significance by Pamela B. Fiar-od; Tingguian Abra Rituals by Philian Louise Weygan; Keeping the Kalinga Heritage Alive in Rituals by Maria Luz D. Fang-asan, Ph.D.; The Bulul in the Social Life of the Ifugao People by Serafin Ngohayon, Ph.D. & Emily Alberto; Ifugao Rituals: Their Features and Significance by Anastacia Lannaon, Ph.D., Nancy Ann Gonzales, Ph.D., Caridad B. Fiar-od.

The 6th ICBE Consultation will be held in 2011 in London, United Kingdom with Igorot UK as host.

## **Impressions**

### **Ricardo Cuyob (Cordi-Bel)**

The Participants: What impressed me in the 5th ICBE consultation is the appearance of many new faces from all age levels, from very young ones to the elderly, who are very cooperative and enthusiastic. Besides, this is of course the "retrouvailles" of familiar faces though some were not there. I noticed that newcomers outnumbered those who regularly participate in this consultation and even if I will include those who attended once or twice, I would say that the number of newcomers is far superior. The attendance too of the second and "third generation" is very impressive though they may be half-Igorots. Nevertheless, they must have felt their being Igorots. I hope this consultation has stirred an interest to continue attaching themselves to their roots.

The Venue: I found the venue perfectly suited to the kind of consultation we have. It has cost us a little bit more but it's worth it because we did the noisiest thing we could without worrying about neighbours around the vicinity complaining. Some of our children including us adults also enjoyed walking in the premises in the early morning and during the short break times.

The Consultation: The contents are good combinations. There is a little bit of theory, practice and a tour to get an idea about the area. Besides, what we see or observe during this visit is certainly enrichment on our part when speaking of knowing other peoples' culture. I have the impression that some of the scheduled program of the consultation seem to have been "bitin," (hanging) mainly due to lack of time, but that feeling of "bitin" should serve as the driving force to look forward to the next ICBE consultation in 2011.

### **Josephine Tallayo Grosskurth (Germany)**

The four-day event was short but fantastic, full of activities and interesting workshops. For example, knowing or learning more about the Bulul and a little review of some Igorot tradition is never a harm, especially to us living in Europe.

It is a very big thanks to Mrs. Emy Marcus from Frankfurt who sent me the invitation of this ICBE Consultation. We had wonderful days meeting lots of friends whom I only knew through

Friendster. Well, I got more friends in Friendster whom I met in Vallendar like guys from Sweden, Switzerland, Ireland, some parts of Germany and other European countries. Anyhow, special thanks also to Manong Rhino Oblas and Manang Norma Wellhausen from Bonn who contacted me before the event.

I do hope to join the ICBE event in England because I promise myself not to miss this occasion. It is a hard job for the organizers and officers but we must not also forget that it is a lot of joy for each and every one of us.

### **Luti Hartong-Taguba (The Netherlands)**

The ICBE Consultation gave me a feeling of going back to the 'ili': Faces with the typical features of people from the Cordillera, incomprehensible dialects being spoken yet some sounds vaguely familiar, music from the gongs and 'solibao' blending into a rhythmic cadence to which the girls and women can dance to. The sense of community was very tangible like in the 'ili' during gatherings. It was during the ICBE Consultation that my children were introduced to their ancestral roots.

My 11-year old son thought it was really 'cool' belonging to a clan, wearing a G-string and playing a gong. My 8-year old daughter thought the costumes and necklaces were very beautiful.

### **Dominga Webber (Igorot-UK)**

First of all, we wish to thank you and the rest of the team who made the ICBE Consultation in Vallendar a success. The fruit of your labour was reflected on how well the participants enjoyed themselves. I'm certain everyone has a lovely story to tell about the whole affair starting from the organizing committee to the site of venue and all the activities.

For me, I think the choice of venue was perfect. The place is beautiful and very clean. The gourmet was appetising and plentiful. I think the staff that catered to our needs at Vallendar deserves a big applause for their effort to make us feel welcome and make sure our bellies were full.

The side trip to the Lorelei and the boat ride along the River Rhine was a nice surprise. Having seen the vast grape plantation along the river, I now understand why lots of British people frequently visit the place just to have a sip of that free wine tasting of the famous wine produced in the Rhine. The good weather complimented the merriment of the group during that day and a special thanks to Mecky (Mrs. Oblas) for her commentary and her rendition of the Lorelei song.

On the plenary session the following day: the presentation by Prof. Caridad Fiar-od (guest speaker) of the research on rituals and traditions of the different Cordillera provinces broadened my knowledge and understanding of why and how rituals are performed, particularly the Bulul of the Ifugao which was highlighted by one of our guest speakers, Prof. Serafin Ngohayon.

Once again the ICBE consultation has brought us together as one big happy family, forging new friendship and renewing acquaintances, and integrating with other cultures and most of all, making us proud and be more united as Igorots. Mabuhay Igorots.

### **Julia Aronchay (BIBAK-Ireland)**

I am indeed very thankful that we attended the ICBE Consultation. I haven't been to one, aside from the Gala Night of the 4th ICBE Consultation held in 2007 in Ireland. I didn't realize I could gain so much. When the rest of BIBAK Ireland changed their minds in attending this affair, I decided not to join as well but just use this opportunity to travel to Germany. But the desire to meet other kailians around the globe surfaced, such that even if we were not yet satisfied with

our tour in Germany, we headed to Vallendar. Should we not have done that, I know I will be sorry. There may be another ICBE Consultation, but each one is unique. Faces may be the same but the wrinkles, frowns and smiles drawn on them will definitely be different. The friends we've gained and the things we learned will always fill part of our treasures in life. Matago tago Cordillera!!!

### **Dr. Serafin L. Ngohayon (Philippines)**

When I was on the plane to Germany, I was deeply contemplating on the significance of my travel vis-à-vis the institution I represent and the expenses I have to incur for the trip. I was then thinking that perhaps, it would be very hard to give justice to the rigors I and my institution endured and may endure for the trip to be realized. When I was on the plane back to the Philippines, I was convinced that the trip is not only justified but also, is a huge success.

My conviction was so strong such that on various occasions, I have shared how the trip shaped me, my thinking and resolve to do my share for the development of Cordillera and its people. In particular, I spoke proudly of our fellow IGOROTS in Europe who are solidly united in their expression of support for each other, who continue to breathe life into their cultural awareness and who share the same to their siblings by coming together as often as possible in brotherly/sisterly sharing. I spoke fondly on how our brother Igorots in Europe made my first sojourn in Germany and Belgium touchingly possible and educationally remembering, 'twas a welcome and hospitality I will forever relish. Their lives shaped by several unique circumstances have made me realize how strong and flexible we Igorots are, strong in overcoming whatever obstacle and flexible in learning to survive, succeed and shine in various difficult situations. The trip made me prouder to be called an IFUGAO in a provincial standpoint and an IGOROT in a regional brotherhood.

As I express my deep gratitude to the wonderful IGOROT peoples of Europe, which space does not allow me to mention, please bear in mind my open invitation to all to partner with us in the academe and help mould the thinking, attitude and character of your fellow Igorots back home so that they will someday be as strong and successful as you.

Haggiyo IGOROTS in Europe, Haggiyo Igorots in the Philippines and Haggiyo Igorots of the World.

Bisitaon dakami hi ISCAF ta mon-ohohha takun uminum hi bayah!

### **Dr. Albert S. Bacdayan (USA)**

Because the Igorots are now global, attending any one of their many conferences offers an opportunity for both international travel and heart-warming fellowship, like no other, with brothers and sisters of the Igorot Diaspora. The Fifth ICBE Consultation was just like that for Carolyn and me. We looked forward to it with anticipation as we travelled going in and looked back on it with fondness and satisfaction as we journeyed to places afterwards. All because ICBE 5 was an interesting, meaningful and memorable experience.

I was impressed by the enthusiasm and concern for each other and to be with each other that I saw at the conference. The enormous personal sacrifices by Rhino and Mecky Oblas, Jane Klee-Morgens and Dr. Yvonne Belen, to name a few, are expressive of this concern and enthusiasm in my view. This is what makes and sustains a sense of community and belongingness. Equally noteworthy, too, was the diversity of Igorots represented. It was wonderful to see Ifugaos, Kalingas including Tinguians and Benguets in addition to the Mountain Province all having fun and fellowship together. The presence and participation of Drs. Serafin Ngohayon and Caridad Fiar-od from the academe in Igorotlandia was special. Both offered informative discussions of their topics to the enrichment of all. I found Dr. Ngohayon's

substantive presentation refreshing because it was new information. Very significant is the attendance of the young and their seeming eagerness to learn and participate. This is identity fixing or forming and identity affirming. I believe the experience paves their way to a sense of belonging, a much needed sense in mass society, and they will appreciate it more and more in time. To hope from the case of the young toddler who danced so marvellously and exquisitely, the attendance of the young could also be the occasion for the emergence of talent. The appreciation the entire community showed will hopefully give encouragement to her and her family to develop her obvious potential to its fullest. There may be an ICBE native in the world of dance in the horizon!

It would be remiss of me not to mention the thoughtful planning of the conference. The selection of the site could not have been better in terms of the conducive, peaceful ambience and services; the smiling and responsive nuns were a unique dimension. The bus ride and cruise along the Rhine were exquisite, offering images and feel good for a lifetime of remembrance. Those nicely manicured vineyards on a top to bottom run, the many castles that dotted the landscape and Loreley are images that, together, form a powerful and enthralling cultural landscape to recall.

Harking back to the tribal diversity noted earlier, I would like to conclude with the observation that if this means that the word "Igorot" is not an issue among the Igorots in Europe, they are a guiding light to us all, natives of the Cordillera mountains. More power to them. They understand correctly that "Igorot" means people of or from the mountains and it does not deny or cancel specific tribal identities such as, Ifugao, Kalinga or Apayao. In this sense, it is a uniting, not a dividing word. One can be a proud Igorot and a proud Ifugao, Kalinga, Ibaloi or what have you to an equal degree.

Thank you all very much, ICBE.

### **Rose Nabert (Canada)**

It was a great conference. You really pulled together and I must say that numbers do not really mean anything if members from outside also help out. The Germany based Igorots, with help from you all, put out a great welcome and an organized program. The venue was perfect...very much like home. I will always remember their Good Friday service at the Pilgrim Church. It was so touching.

Of course it was also good to see everyone! These gatherings are storehouses of memories!

Again, thank you.

### **Jane Klee-Morgens (Germany)**

The 5th ICBE Consultation has successfully served its purpose to the satisfaction of the participants and more to the benefit and pleasure of Igorots in Germany. The success was not a coincidence but was earned by all involved. Participants, guests and resource persons, members of the preparatory committee, and contact persons contributed their best and complemented each other's task during the consultation. The venue provided us the possibility to practice our socio-cultural and spiritual rituals, without restrictions.

We Igorots (1st, 2nd and 3rd generation; full or partially-blooded Igorot - iAplay, Ibaloy, Isneg, Kalanguya or Ifugao) in Europe, Canada, USA and the Philippines came to know each other better and learn more from one another. We found out that Cordillera people vary in their rituals however, all are directed to the welfare of life, land and nature. We were flexible and oriented with great respect to life, land and nature; we are culturally rich. We also proved that we Igorots are fast learners.

Non-Igorots came to learn about us and with respect, observed that the Igorots are Pilipinos in heart and mind - warm-hearted, hard working, simple and trustworthy.

The ICBE consultation was an alternative to a vacation or holiday and was an opportunity to quench our homesickness. It gave us moral support to understand our Igorot identity. This consultation challenged us Igorots, especially in Germany. It inspired us to think of forming an Igorot group.

Long live ICBE!