

ASSEMBLY OF CORDILLERA PEOPLE IN EUROPE (ACPE) (Tungtongan Iti Umili Kordilyera-Europa)

I. Introduction

A. Brief Situation of the Cordillera Region

The Cordillera people in the northern Philippines numbering 1.3 million, being a part of the Filipino people, are subjected to the same reasons, which causes out migration. These are: lack of jobs, low wages, lack of opportunities for advancement and poverty. Thus, the thousands of migrants from the Cordillera, most of whom are women, are a part of the estimated seven and a half million Filipinos abroad and the more than 500,000 Filipinos in Europe. They come from different ethnolinguistic groups, which are: Ibaloi, Kankanaey, Bontoc, Ifugao, Tinggualan, Kalinga and Isneg.

The Cordillera is rich in natural resources but the people are poor. Its wealth is in the hands of big foreign mining, logging and energy corporations. Close to 1.2 million hectares out, of its land area of 1.8 million hectares are opened for mining exploration and plunder. Its nine rivers are tapped for huge hydroelectric plants or lowland irrigation, displacing and threatening thousands from their ancestral lands. The entire Cordillera is designed to play a role in the “development strategy” of the government as resource base region, mineral exploitation and eco-tourism. Budget allocation for social services (education and health) is minimal. Agriculture, which is the main source of livelihood and income, remains backward.

The provinces of the Cordillera region are the most neglected and with the highest poverty level in the Philippines. More than 25 per cent are unemployed and underemployed. There are social problems of school dropouts, child labor estimated as more than 17,700 and lately prostitution.

One coping mechanism to get out of the state of poverty is migration abroad, which is promoted by the government through its Labor Export Policy (LEP). Through the LEP, the government earns annually US\$ 6-7 billion from the remittances of migrants. These remittances keep afloat debt-ridden Philippine economy.

B. Cordillera people in Europe

The Cordillera migrants are found in almost all the countries in Europe. Significant concentrations are in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Greece, Italy, Spain, Austria and Switzerland.

In Europe, Cordillera migrants are actively taking part in the struggle for the protection of migrant’s rights and welfare, upholding the dignity of migrants and seeking ways to be in solidarity with the Cordillera people’s struggle for land and life. This is being done through their self-organizations. They are confronted with the common problem of legalization, long working hours, low pay, discrimination and racism, abuse, deskilling, separation from family and/or loved ones, problem of cultural adjustment, excessive collections of fees and government neglect.

In other global regions, the Cordillera migrants are organizing themselves and are actively taking part in mobilizations for migrant rights and welfare. They take part in

cultural activities to show the richness of our culture. They promote mutual help and activities to support projects in the Cordillera and to respond to emergencies.

The continuing economic crisis in the Philippines will definitely force more to migrate. However, destinations like Europe are taking harsh measures to restrict the entry of migrants and their families and to exercise more control on those who are already in.

On the other hand, many European governments and organizations endorse and support the UN Decade of Indigenous Peoples (1994-2004), which migrant indigenous communities can use for recognition and support.

There is an urgent need to bring together all the initiatives of Cordillera people in Europe to achieve impact and further empowerment. Thus, it is necessary, advantageous and possible for them to have a Europe-wide voice and platform.

II. The Proposal:

Develop and foster a sense of Cordillera community and solidarity among Cordillera people in Europe by providing the opportunity for them to come together in an assembly of sharing, celebration and visioning. Concretely, it means the convening of an **Assembly of Cordillera People in Europe (ACPE)**.

The convening of the ACPE is along the long tradition of the Cordillera people of resistance against Spanish and US colonizers, opposition to “development aggression” by big corporations, promotion of unity and harmony among the people and unity with the entire Filipino people for national sovereignty and genuine democracy.

There is a direct co-relationship of poverty and the out migration. Knowing such and determining how migrants can be instruments for change is in itself liberating.

III. ACPE

1. **Theme: STRENGTHENING THE CORDILLERA COMMUNITY IN EUROPE AND FOSTERING SOLIDARITY WITH THE CORDILLERA PEOPLE’S ASPIRATION FOR LIFE, LAND AND SELF-DETERMINATION.**
2. **General objective:** To set in motion the process of empowering the Cordillera people in Europe
3. **Specific objectives**
 - a. To provide an opportunity for the Cordillera people to share their situation and aspiration as migrants in Europe.
 - b. To establish and strengthen a Cordillera people’s network in Europe.
 - c. To enable the Cordillera people in Europe to know the situation in the Cordillera and appreciate the role they can play in bringing about much needed changes in the Cordillera and in the Philippines.
 - d. To adopt a general program of action for empowerment.
 - e. To celebrate life and hope.
4. **Date: April 19, 20 & 21, 2002**
5. **Venue: Gent, Belgium**

6. *Participants*

- a. At least five from each Igorot organization.
- b. Individual Igorots in Europe
- c. Cordillera Contacts
- d. Guests: Filipino migrant organizations, allies and/or advocates and other IP organizations in Europe

7. *Character of the ACPE*

The ACPE is essentially a platform for sharing, coordination of activities and instrument for lobbying in Europe and in the Philippines. All organizations and individuals are welcome to its assemblies, except those involved in anti-social activities like drug dealers, sex trafficking, illegal recruiting and activities inimical to the protection of migrant rights and welfare.

In between the assemblies, a Continuing Committee will prepare for the next assembly, implement the assembly resolutions and program, and represent the assembly.