

Review of the 3rd ICBE Consultation

Frederick Baldo

The 3rd Igorot Cordillera [BIMAAK] Cordillera Europe (ICBE) Consultation with the theme, "Our Igorot Cordillera Culture: Heritage and Social Integration" was held from 5-8 May 2005 in Aeschi, Switzerland. Out of the 87 participants, there were 56 from the first generation, 20 from the second and 11 supporters. The represented organizations were: Igorot Organization-Austria, Cordillera Community in Belgium, BIBAK-Ireland, BIBAK Switzerland, Igorot-UK, Association of Igorot Migrant Workers in Israel, IGO Philippines and IGO. Individual participants came from Germany and The Netherlands

BIBAK Switzerland hosted the activity. We began our preparation in the summer of 2003. Using the evaluation from the 2nd Igorot European Consultation held in May 2003 in Vienna, we made a general framework and assigned tasks to 11 active members. To overcome the problem of dispersed location, we limited our meetings and communicated through electronic mail. After we were able to find a venue, we planned the budget, program, transport services, stage and hall decoration, and sightseeing tour. In Lolit Hafner-Monico's article, Overview of the Preparation and Planning, she wrote, "We have worked on the principle that quite a few people, each putting in a small contribution, can make big things happen and create benefits to all concerned."

The features of the opening program were the turnover ritual by Patrick Bounggick of Igorot Austria to Henry Foken of BIBAK Switzerland, welcome remarks and introduction of participants.

The activities on cultural heritage were talks, power point presentation and workshop group discussions while those on social integration were workshop group discussions and the Gala Night.

On the Igorot cultural heritage, Mia Abeya and Severino Oblas answered the question, "What is it in our culture that we want to pass on to the next generation?" Mia Abeya spoke of four components of culture namely: beliefs, social institutions, humanities and technology. She enumerated the basic values common to them, which are: concept of strength, patience and ingenuity in technology, one-ness with nature, respect for the elderly, sharing with the community, simple living and cultivation of strong family ties.

Rhino Oblas cited what Paulino Martin, a resident of Beckel, La Trinidad, Benguet, said, "Actually, in cases of ritual performances to be done, it can not be passed directly to the younger generation, anytime whatsoever when their parents are still alive. Elders often say; "It's up to them... in the future", ``Uway pay man en da-eda`` And Rhino Oblas added, "Beliefs and cultural values which are adapted to the present lifestyle should be preserved while those that do not conform but hamper growth and development must be eliminated. The result of advance science and technology is within our midst and only education, as the most effective instrument, can make people understand these fact and events."

The participants had a chance to answer the question during the workshop group discussion. Their responses were:

1. *Bagbaga* or counselling from elders.
2. Having family gatherings.
3. Bringing the children home to the Philippines for them to know their roots.
4. The *bodong* or peace pact as a tribal institution to resolve conflicts.
5. Belief that mountains, rivers, forests and trees are gifts from Kabunyan.
6. Respect for customary laws.
7. Appreciation of indigenous food preparation.
8. Rituals that convey meanings like *uggayam*, *ullalim* or *da-ing*.
9. Indigenous knowledge, artefacts and symbols that tell the history and lives of Igorots.

In the workshop group discussion of the second generation, they mentioned the following as core values of the Igorot culture they want to have:

1. education among the youth,
2. hard work ethic,
3. close family values and sanctity of marriage,
4. community spirit through gatherings and social activities,
5. caring and concern for fellow Igorots,
6. respect for elders,
7. performing rituals and understanding their value, and
8. continuing to learn more dances, music and art forms.

On social integration, the participants had a workshop group discussion on aging migrants and retirement. It was pointed out that education is an important issue in aging. This conclusion was based on the topics discussed, which were: educate young generation to care for themselves, prepare yourself financially, and writing about will and testament. In another workshop, the concept of an association for overseas Filipino workers and their spouses to ensure the protection of the retirees came up. During the Gala Night the participants experienced another aspect of social integration through the presence of the Jodlergruppe Alpengruss Aeschiried. They first sang, swayed the huge cowbells on their waist and played the accordion. And the Igorots later sang and danced. Afterwards, the yodellers were beating the gongs and the Igorots were swaying the cowbells. It was a merging of two cultures.

Meanwhile, other topics in the workshop group discussions were on Cordillera issues and migrant concerns and stories of our Igorot culture. The recommendations were to:

1. conduct information on the impact of the 1995 Mining Act and the operations of transnational mining corporations (TNMC) on the livelihood, environment, culture and right to self-determination of the Cordillera people,
2. call on the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) and the provincial officials in the Cordillera to create a Commission on Migrant Workers and Their Families to protect and advance migrant rights, and
3. publish stories on Igorot culture to include practices of birth, child rearing, sickness, marriage and daily life practices.

The second generation Igorots also had their workshop discussion group. Some of their recommendations were to:

1. have activities for younger Igorots like games; outings; workshops on how to play traditional instruments and how to use Igorot tools such as liga-o, lusong (pagbayu-an,
2. contact the leaders of each country to get the members or names of 2nd generation Igorots in each organization, and
3. start a youth publication or email group.

Additional parts of the consultation were:

1. speech by Her Excellency Rora Navarro-Tolentino, Philippine Ambassador to Switzerland, where she commended the efforts of Igorots wherever they are, to gather and try to do something to promote their dignity as a people and contribute to human prosperity, peace and harmony;
2. video showing of "Bontoc Eulogy," a film on the Igorots who were brought to St. Louis, Missouri, USA for exhibition at the 1904 World's Fair;
3. power point presentation on the Igorot International Consultation-6 (IIC-6) held in Melbourne, Australia;
4. listening to an Alphorn player; and
5. sightseeing tour to Aareslucht and Interlaken with Juerg Hafner as guide.

The program closed with a liturgical celebration led by the Rev. Cesar Taguba, turning over the responsibility of hosting the ICBE consultation by Lolit Hafner-Monico to BIBAK Ireland - Judith Balangyao and Jane Gavino, closing remarks by Violeta Passerini, and a closing chant by Dr. Albert Bacdayan.

Post-consultation activities included publication of the Proceedings, production of a DVD on the consultation and a CD with pictures, and posting the documentation on BIBAK Switzerland's website: www.bibak.ch.

I would like to end with excerpts from Natascha Passerini's thank you letter to Mia Abeya:

On behalf of Swiss-Igorot youth I want to thank you for the wonderful presentation you held during last weekend's convention in Aeschi. For us it was very helpful to understand more about the Igorot culture although we couldn't stay the whole meeting. But we are now eager to learn more about it and hopefully there are more occasions in the future to do so and to be close to our elders so that you can tell us about your experiences. That's why I completely agree with your suggestion about the topic for the next convention: "Getting deeper into the Igorot culture". As you said: What should we tell our children about the Igorot culture if our elders don't teach us about it? We'll certainly keep that in mind and we'll make sure that we can tell our grandchildren about that wonderful culture."

Thank you.