

# **Workshop Group Discussion on Topics of Interest**

## **Group 1: Cordillera Concerns and Migrant Issues**

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Dealing with the Cordillera concerns and Migrants issues has its sad and happy stories. In our workshop, we lamented with the sad stories but at the same time found encouragement and strengths with the happy ones.

Here are some stories that we have seen as “not happy ones” in our workshop. What is famous is the story of the Republic Act no. 7942 known as the Philippine Mining Act of 1995. In January 27, 2004, the Philippine Supreme Court declared this mining law unconstitutional but then on December 1 of that year, the same court reversed its decision and made it legal. Besides, to further assure the liberalization of the Philippine mining industry, the Department of Energy and Natural Resources (DENR) crafted the Mineral Action Plan under the Executive Order 270 with the aim of revitalizing the Philippine Mining Industry.

We have learned that in the whole Philippines, the 23 areas identified as priority mining locations under this Mineral Action Plan and the President’s Executive Order 270, are within the Cordillera provinces. These include the areas covered by the Teresa Gold and Far Southeast Gold Projects of the Lepanto Consolidated Mining Company, the Padcal Expansion Project of the Philex Mining Corporation, and the Itogon Gold Project of the Itogon-Suyoc Mines in the province of Benguet; the Batong Buhay Gold Project in the province of Kalinga; and the Bucay Magnetite River Iron Sand Project, Sanvig Iron Sand and Alluvial Gold Project, and Capcapo Copper-Gold Project of the Abra Mining and Industrial Corporation in the province of Abra. The Guidance Management Corporation (GMC) and Aracorn Power and Energy Corporation (APEC) are among the mining and energy companies that are expressing their interest in the province of Kalinga. GMC is applying for a permit to explore the geothermal potentials of this province. In addition, there are more than 100 standing applications filed by various corporations for permits to mine the Cordillera – for example, Newmont’s applications for Financial and Technical Assistance Agreement (FTAA) that will cover large portions of Apayao, Kalinga, Mountain Province, Abra, the Ilocos Sur uplands, Benguet, Ifugao, and the Nueva Vizcaya uplands. Combining all these applications will cover an area of about 1.4 million hectares in the Cordillera.

The human rights issues in the Cordillera as well as in the whole Philippines are very alarming. Killings by assassination and attempts of eliminating people’s leaders continue to happen in spite of the call of many organisations and concerned peoples on the national and international level to the Arroyo government to do something to stop it. The Cordillera Administrative Region is also among the heavy militarized areas in the Philippines and oftentimes massive militarization disturbs the cultural tranquility of the community.

On the migrant issues, there is the concern of aging among the first generations of Igorots in Europe, which will certainly confront us in the next five years. Migrants as an important sector in the Philippine society have not come up yet with a parliamentary representation that will look closely on the welfare of migrants and their families. Internationally, there are only 34 countries that have ratified the “United

Nations International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.” It was adopted by the General Assembly in 1990 and the treaty only entered into force in 2003. But most of the countries that signed and ratified the treaty are the labour-sending countries, like the Philippines. To this effect, the UN’s independent expert on the rights of migrants has called on its member-states to ratify this international treaty, which seeks to protect the almost 200 million migrant workers around the world against abuse.

Jorge Bustamante, the UN’s special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants is hopeful that more states would ratify the treaty during the Global Forum on Migration and Development to be held in Belgium in July 2007. He also called for the creation of a Voluntary Fund to allow the world’s least developed countries to attend the forum.

This treaty, among others things, calls for a halt to the clandestine employment of irregular migrants so that they do not work in abusive conditions but enjoy safe and decent work and equal wages. It also provides for assistance to the orderly return of migrants to their home countries, so that they can enjoy adequate economic and social conditions for their reintegration.

Vis-à-vis these sad stories are happy and challenging ones. In Kalinga for instance, villagers stood fast and accused the GMC of arrogance and disrespect to their culture when the firm started explorations for sulphur and took mineral samples without getting the approval of the affected tribal communities. The Colayo tribal folks alleged that the company stole mineral samples from the area. They said that the GMC tried to deceive them because the company is actually interested in the minerals found in the area and the claim of sulphur exploration was just a ploy.

The Igorots in diaspora are also responding to the many faces of the Cordillera concerns in many ways and in various means. The Igorot Scholarship Program (ISP) that came out after holding several Igorot International Consultations is one example. Efforts of many overseas workers to participate on the May 14, 2007 midterm election in the Philippines by directly voting or calling their relatives at home to vote for a favoured candidate or party list is also a response. On the 6<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) to be held from May 14-27, 2007 in New York, three women from the Cordillera went to attend. This session will focus on the indigenous peoples’ rights to lands, territories and natural resources. Besides, this will also include presentation on other key issues such as urban indigenous peoples and migration, data collection and disaggregation. In our workshop, we were optimistic that this 6<sup>th</sup> session of the UNPFII will come up with recommendations that address the indigenous peoples’ pressing issues.

As a conclusion, we take the sad stories and gloomy situation we see at home as a challenge and the happy ones as inspiration and encouragement in our endeavours and in our groups, organisations or consultations, big or small.

As recommendations, we recommend to all Igorots in Europe to support the Igorot Scholarship Program (ISP) in every way they can. We often hear also the word “successful” or “success.” But oftentimes this is measured with material things such as the amount of money earned, the educational degree that one obtained or a project that was properly executed. We recommend that our idea of “Success” or

“Successful” be remoulded so that as a value, we will look at it in a way wherein we will gauge “success” with the life-giving services one has rendered to the masses, that the success of a project, for instance, be evaluated automatically on how it improved or bettered the lives of the poor people.

The Three Spirits of the Workshop:

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