



CORDILLERA PEOPLES ALLIANCE

For the Defense of the Ancestral Domain and for Self Determination

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A Year after the Aquino Presidency: Cordillera IPs Not Better Off

Today marks one year of Pres. Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino’s presidency, which started with high hopes and numerous promises. On this note, the CPA is very disappointed at PNoy for not investigating and trying Gloria Macapagal Arroyo for the numerous cases of human rights violations, plunder and corruption that she committed during her 9-year term. The creation of the Truth Commission is futile as it never delivered on the issues it was supposed to resolve, especially those involving GMA. Unemployment and hunger have worsened, plunging Filipinos into greater economic hardship.

PNoy never answered to the challenges and urgent issues articulated by indigenous peoples nationwide thru the Indigenous Peoples Agenda duly submitted to Malacañang on August 5 last year. Among the issues raised here include the plunder and exploitation of ancestral lands and resources therein, militarization, the need to resume the peace negotiations, on policy reform, among others. In fact, liberalization of the mining industry heightened under the Aquino presidency: mining investments increased by 65% in 2010 alone. Data from the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) show that approved mining agreements at a nationwide scale now reach 785 since March 2011, while mining concessions increased to 1,042, 531 hectares in 2010 compared to 782,000 hectares in 2009. Initial data from the Kalipunan ng Katutubong Mamamayan ng Pilipinas (KAMP) show that at a nationwide scale, 5 of the 6 Financial Technical Assistance Agreements (FTAA) ; 118 of the 338 approved Mineral Production Sharing Agreement (MPSA); 39 of the 89 Exploration Permit (EP), and 8 of the 49 Mineral Processing Permits are within ancestral lands of indigenous peoples.

Heightened Development Aggression

The Cordillera region remained a haven for plunder and exploitation under Aquino: In fact, 247 applications have already been endorsed and approved under the present Aquino regime. The regime has retained five Cordillera locations among its 23 priority mine development sites. Of the Cordillera’s total land area of 1.8 million hectares, close to a million are covered by mining tenements. Apart from mining are projects to tap the Cordillera’s energy resources. Five geothermal projects are in the offing: the Acupan and Daclan projects in Benguet, the Buguias-Tinoc project in Benguet and Ifugao, the Mainit-Sadanga project in the Mountain Province and the Kalinga project. The last is the biggest – involving substantial portions of the municipalities of Tinglayan, Pasil, and Lubuagan. It is being undertaken by the global energy giant Chevron, which has a clear track record violating indigenous peoples’ rights in the Amazon. With these developments, what future faces the Cordillera—the watershed cradle of Northern Luzon?

Across the region, mining and energy companies have violated the right of indigenous communities to self-determination and to free, prior, informed consent (FPIC). We have seen this take place in Benguet (Bakun, Mankayan, Itogon, Bokod), Abra (Baay-Licuan, Lacub), Kalinga (Balbalan, Tabuk, Lubuagan, Tinglayan) and Apayao (Conner) – often with the collusion of officers of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, and sometimes even with the collaboration of local government. The attempts to manipulate FPIC processes have, however, been foiled by the communities’ organizations who did not succumb to trickery, bribery, pressure or coercion.

Militarization remains a constant companion to development aggression in the Cordillera, to secure the State’s economic interests. Four regular and three special battalions of the AFP are deployed in mining

areas within the territories of indigenous peoples. The main units operating in Abra province are the 41st and 50th Infantry Battalions (IB) of the 503rd Brigade, 5th Division, Philippine Army. Also operating here are the 52nd Division Reconnaissance Company (DRC), which is a counter-insurgency strike force, and a company of the 77th IB, which serves as the cadre corps for the paramilitary Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAFGU).

But the persecution and harassment of political activists, development workers and health workers continue; likewise, the military occupation of indigenous peasant villages. GMA's undeclared policy of state terrorism, embodied in Oplan Bantay Laya, has been replaced by PNoy's Oplan Bayanihan-- same military terrorism, albeit under a different name and employing a modified approach.

With these developments at the national level and in the region, the present Aquino regime has yet to prove the sincerity of its promise of good government, as it has utterly failed to uplift the marginalized state of Cordillera indigenous peoples. Thus, in a span of one year, PNoy showed that his regime is no different from past administrations.

The people of the Cordillera must therefore persist in building a Cordillera mass movement that asserts our peoples' right to ancestral domain and self determination. #

Reference:

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