PRESS RELEASE

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**CPA criticizes Philippine government in UN Forum**

The Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) criticized the Philippine government for its inaction over the worsening violations of the rights of Igorots and other indigenous peoples in the country during the 15th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues held from May 9-20, 2016 at the UN Headquarters, New York City.

In a statement delivered by Sarah Dekdeken to the Forum on May 10, she stressed that “The Philippine government continues its reign of terror, committing crimes against indigenous peoples, and outrightly violating our collective rights to our ancestral lands and plunder of our resources through destructive mining and energy projects. Its counter-insurgency program *Oplan Bayanihan* has resulted in the militarization of our communities, extrajudicial killings, development aggression and other human rights violations committed with impunity against indigenous peoples. Under President Benigno Aquino’s administration, at least one indigenous person is killed every month, with a total of more than 90 victims from July 2010 to April 2016.”

According to Dekdeken, “Environmental activists and leaders of peoples’ organizations continue to experience threats to their lives for actively campaigning against the plunder and destruction of our ancestral lands and natural resources and for defending our rights as indigenous peoples and human rights. In April 2016, the Vice Chairperson of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance, Mr. Xavier Akien, experienced death threats through surveillance by armed men, which, in our experience, often leads to extrajudicial killing or enforced disappearance.”

CPA continues to demand justice for the victims of extrajudicial killings and other human rights violations, and for the prosecution and punishment of the perpetrators of these rights violations – members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and Philippine National Police, and mining and energy companies. It also calls for the pull out of mining and energy companies that are processing projects in the region, and for large-scale mining operations to stop (Lepanto Consolidated Mining Company, Philex Mining Company).

“The Philippine government enacted the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) and established the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) supposedly to promote the rights and welfare of Philippine indigenous peoples. But these have been proven inutile in protecting our rights. In fact, the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples has served as an instrument in violating IP rights, which is why CPA and other indigenous peoples’ organizations in the country are calling for the abolition of NCIP. In addition, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and previous recommendations of the Permanent Forum have not been implemented at all,” added Dekdeken.

On May 11, a day after Dekdeken delivered a statement in behalf of CPA, the new Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations, Ms. Lourdes Ortiz Yparraguirre, delivered the Philippine government’s statement on the implementation of the UNDRIP in the Philippines.

“We were very disappointed with the statement of the Philippine government, which only boasted of the IPRA, Conditional Cash Transfer and other poverty alleviation programs of the government that they claim to have benefited indigenous peoples. There was no response to the issues raised by the CPA. There was no mention of the human rights violations committed against indigenous peoples, the plunder of indigenous peoples’ lands, the environment and natural resources, and the government’s neglect in providing basic social services to indigenous communities. This just shows how much the government is ignoring the life and death issues faced by indigenous peoples as it continues to violate our rights,” added Dekdeken.

“We urge the Permanent Forum to take immediate and decisive steps to end the extrajudicial killing and indigenous peoples’ rights violations, and the State-driven misery faced by indigenous peoples in the Philippines. We urge the Philippine government to take concrete steps to truly respect and protect our rights to our lands, resources, social and economic development, cultural integrity, education and health. We demand the scrapping of oppressive laws, policies and programs that displace our communities, plunder our resources, destroy our environment, hinder our development, and violate our national sovereignty, such as the Philippine Mining Act of 1995, *Oplan Bayanihan*, Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, among others. We urge the Philippine Government to comply with its obligations under International Humanitarian Law, the UNDRIP, and other international human rights instruments to which the Philippine government is a signatory,” said Dekdeken.

The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is an advisory body to the UN Economic and Social Council established in 2001. The Forum has the mandate to discuss indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights. It holds sessions annually and is participated by more than a thousand delegates and observers, mostly indigenous peoples’ organizations. The ongoing 15th Session of the Forum bears the theme “Indigenous Peoples: Conflict, Peace and Resolution.”###