



CORDILLERA PEOPLES ALLIANCE

For the Defense of the Ancestral Domain and for Self Determination

13 July 2012

On the People's Cordillera Day and Genuine Regional Autonomy

The government celebrates its version of Cordillera Day on July 15 which has been declared a holiday. The Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) takes this occasion as an opportunity to impart anew on the People's Cordillera Day, that CPA has organized without fail for the past 28 years every April 24; with the active annual participation and solidarity of at least 4,000 to 6,000 indigenous peoples and advocates from the Cordillera provinces, other Philippine regions and overseas. It is also an opportunity to tell the story, and the folly associated with the July 15 Cordillera Day; and thus clarify contexts without which incomplete information leads to revisions in Cordillera history.

April 24: the people's Cordillera Day

The people's Cordillera Day is April 24—the day ama Macliing Dulag, a respected pangat from Kalinga and one of the many leaders of the Bontok and Kalinga peoples opposition to the World Bank-funded Chico dams under the dictatorship of Marcos, was slain by State military, in the dead of the night, witnessed by his wife and village/tribal people in his own house in Bugnay, Tinglayan, Kalinga. This was on April 24, 1980. From 1981 to 1984, April 24 was commemorated as the Macli-ing Memorials. The martyrdom of Ama Macliing strengthened and further galvanized the people's solidarity, unity, and opposition to projects and programs that would destroy the ancestral land. In June 1984, a Cordillera Peoples Congress established the Cordillera Peoples Alliance for the Defense of the Ancestral Domain and for Self Determination. From 1985 onwards, CPA has led the annual commemoration and celebration of Cordillera Day, which later evolved into a mass movement event, tackling regional issues confronting the indigenous peoples of the Cordillera. To set the record straight, no other entity but the mass movement through CPA has sustained the people's Cordillera Day. April 24 is the Cordillera Day embraced by the people, as it addresses their issues and has the weight of history, thus it continues to be a meaningful day for them. We look forward to the 29th Celebration next year, in April 2013, being an election year and therefore an added occasion for people's issues.

One of the early popular campaigns of the CPA is Regionalization and Beyond. First was Regionalization to unite the Cordillera highland mainly inhabited by indigenous peoples as an integrated region that would relate as one with the national government for administration, planning and services. And Beyond was the long term goal for Regional autonomy as the appropriate application of self determination for the Cordillera region as mainly indigenous peoples. Until then, Cordillera provinces were split into Region I with Abra, Mtn Province, Benguet, Baguio City; and Region II with Ifugao and the then Kalinga- Apayao. The Cordillera provinces were of course marginalized in the regions where they were located. This was part of divide and rule and of perpetuating historical neglect of the Cordillera. The broad multi sector campaign for Regionalization and Beyond, was immensely popular with the grassroots and middle forces from local to national, including at the 1986 Constitutional Convention that CPA activists and advocates successfully lobbied thus the provision for Regional autonomy in the present Constitution. With this context and history, the July 15, 1987 creation of the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) by President Cory Aquino was merely the formality, or cake icing, on the realization of the popular objective for Regionalization, that CPA and advocates waged specifically since 1985. Regionalization of the Cordillera has been an achievement indeed, with key role of the progressive mass movement that did ground work on information and education on Cordillera history, indigenous peoples rights and the right to self determination, and for Regionalization of the Cordillera.

As for the long term goal of Regional autonomy, this remains an aspiration to be achieved not in haste but in due time; with sufficient information and education, resolve and unity of all provinces and cities of the Cordillera to function as a genuine regional autonomous region as the operation of self determination for Cordillera peoples.

At its founding Congress, the CPA defined regional autonomy as the appropriate form of self determination for the Cordillera indigenous peoples, with full recognition and respect of indigenous peoples' ancestral land and indigenous socio political systems that are the material basis for IPs identity. This essentially differs from mere local and structural autonomy embodied in the regional autonomy proposed by traditional politicians, as in the present 3rd draft now making the rounds of consultations in the provinces. The CPA

maintains its position to reject bogus regional autonomy, as it did with the rejection of the first two attempts in 1990 and in 1997. Without genuine recognition of indigenous people's rights like by addressing current issues of development aggression and militarization, as well as sufficient awareness and people's empowerment; the present third attempt at Regional Autonomy in the cordillera may again be rejected. In case of the imposition of any form of bogus regional autonomy, CPA will continue its awareness, organizing, and advocacy towards future realization of genuine regional autonomy.

Executive Order 220 and CPLA

How then did government come up with a Cordillera Day on July 15? Another story must be told. July 15, 1987 marks the day Executive Order 220 was passed under the Cory Aquino administration, for the creation of a Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) as it is now. From the Cory Aquino government (top advisers) and the CPLA vantage point, it is a result of the September 13, 1986 so called peace pact or *sipat* between the Aquino regime and the paramilitary Cordillera Peoples Liberation Army (CPLA). With the Mt Data Peace Accord, the Cory Aquino regime embraced the paramilitary CPLA, and turned its back on the CPA and the mass movement in the Cordillera who were Cory Aquino allies in the fight against the Marcos Dictatorship and in the 1986 elections that put Cory Aquino in power. The much publicized sipat or Mount Data Peace Accord has long been exposed as a sham, as only *binodngan* tribes engage in *sipat*. CPLA then harassed and even murdered CPA officers and members, yet the Cory Aquino regime turned a blind eye. CPLA is responsible for various human rights violations in the region, including extrajudicial killing of CPA's leaders and members, namely Ama Daniel Ngayaan of Tanglag, Lubuagan, Kalinga and Romy Gardo of Abra. The CPLA publicly admitted responsibility for Ama Ngayaan's death; but instead of punishing CPLA, the Cory Aquino administration coddled and made them kingpins in the region. These were difficult times for the CPA and the mass movement in the Cordillera, as the Cory Aquino regime also unleashed its total war policy with Oplan Lambat Bitag, that harassed and victimized grass roots organizations and activists.

Back to EO 220 that is celebrated on July 15, it institutionalized CPLA bodies and key people in the structures created by EO 220- in the Cordillera Regional assembly (CRA), the Cordillera Executive Board (CEB), and the CPLA Cordillera Bodong Administration (CBAD) organization. In 2000, Congress abolished the CEB, CRA and CBAAd for their utter failure to implement their mandate as preparatory for regional autonomy, i.e. to conduct IEC on regional autonomy. The shameless opportunism of the Cory Aquino Regime and the paramilitary CPLA is already history and merits frequent retelling for the education of younger generations. Foremost to learn from this should be Pres Pnoy.

But under the government of PNoy,privileges are again being given to the CPLA, with the passage of EO 49 and the MOA entered into by government through the Office of the President on the Peace Process and the CPLA. Through EO 49, the CPLA has been converted into a socio economic group, with the power again to dispense projects. An initial budget was provided last year amounting to P200 M. The CPLA was never made accountable for its human rights violations in the Cordillera, and now they are being pampered with millions of project funds. It seems that government under Pnoy does not learn from history, not even with his *daang matuwid*..

Going back to July 15, CPA calls for the scrapping of EO 220, and the passage of another executive order to make the Cordillera a regular region as in others. Make no mistake that the CPA is for autonomy from the start, and has been at the forefront for it. Regional autonomy is the practice of self determination and must emanate from the grassroots, given present constraints to this aspiration that we have. The process cannot be rushed or dictated, it will certainly take time, if we are to seriously carry out people's participation and empowerment—and there is no substitute for such a process. ***

Supplements to this statement (attached): Cordillera Day Historical Background and CPA central statement on the third attempt at a law to create a Cordillera autonomous region

Reference:

Abie Anongos, Secretary General