

Concept Paper

Lakbayan ng Pambansang Minorya

The National Minorities in the Philippines

The national minorities in the Philippines are special sectors of society which face similar problems as the rest of the Filipino people – under feudal inequalities, elitist governance, and foreign domination – but distinctly suffer from national oppression.

National minorities are the economically, politically, and socially marginalized ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines. They comprise roughly 15-20 percent of total Philippine population.

They comprise 153 ethnolinguistic groups nationwide, as broken down into the main regional groupings: the Moro people (13 ethnolinguistic groups) and Lumad people (18 ethnolinguistic groups) of Mindanao; the Cordillera people (7 ethnolinguistic groups) and the Aggay, Kalinga and various groupings of Northern Luzon; the Aya of Central Luzon; Dumagat, Mangyan, and Palawan Hilltribes of Southern Luzon; and the Tumandok and Ati of the Panay region in the Visayas.

Together with the Filipino people, they suffer the burden of a pre-industrial and backward agrarian economy, abetted by the state's subservience to foreign domination and control of resources.

Adding to their burden as national minorities is the oppression brought about by the national government's policies that seek to plunder resources within their ancestral domain and the suppression of their right to self-determination.

Continuing Attacks on Lands and Territories of National Minorities

The Philippine government launched a series of counter-insurgency programs to decimate the resistance of the Moro and indigenous peoples. *Oplan Bayanihan* had been unleashed by the Aquino regime and militarists in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) are working for the extension of this internal security program responsible for Lumad killings, internal displacements, and other atrocities.

It has deployed thousands of the AFP in communities of the Moro and indigenous peoples. With 60 percent of AFP combat troops operating in Mindanao alone, these soldiers have inundated the countryside where large-scale mining corporations and big agribusiness plantations and other extractive industries enjoy the armed protection of the state at the expense of peoples' rights to their lands and territories.

The U.S. "war on terror" that categorizes any form of resistance as terrorism has been specifically directed at Moro communities. Mystery bombings such as the recent Davao blasts on September 2, 2016 have been designed to stoke Islamophobia and justify continued warrantless arrests and detention of the Moro people.

At the root of these fascist attacks are the State's thrusts for neo-liberal economics which includes the liberalization of the mining, energy, and other extractive industries. The AFP has set up Investment Defense Forces dotting millions of hectares of mining concessions. This is evident in indigenous and Moro communities where most of the \$840 billion worth of mineral deposits sit atop ancestral lands and territories.

Political repression and state fascism have bred an ever-growing people's resistance principally waged by national minorities. Under former President Benigno Simeon Aquino's leadership, Lumad leaders were not only coopted, those who continue to resist were threatened, slapped with trumped-up charges and worse eliminated and replaced with a coopted community leader. The AFP created, trained and coddled paramilitary groups disguised as traditional warriors of Lumad tribes. Indigenous schools have been harassed, vilified as rebel infrastructure, ordered closed, and burned.

Even with an ongoing unilateral ceasefire declared by the Philippine government, indigenous and Moro communities cry against the continuing presence of AFP troops in their communities. While the internally displaced communities of Han-ayan, Surigao del Sur and of Talaingod, Davao del Norte have returned to their lands, the continuing presence of the military in these towns make their rebuilding efforts tenuous. The evacuees of San Fernando, Bukidnon and Kapalong, Davao del Norte also continue to live in the evacuation centers as AFP-backed paramilitary groups are still sowing fear in their communities.

The Rights of National Minorities and the Struggle for a Just Peace under the Duterte Government

National minorities, along with the Filipino people, are hopeful that change will come their way under the administration of President Rodrigo Duterte. This change should reflect their struggle for the full recognition of the rights to ancestral lands and to self-determination, and the institutional rectification of national oppression and discrimination.

Duterte's dialogues with the Lumad IDPs and his pledge to heed their plight has led to their actual return to communities and are now rebuilding their lives. The President had also ordered the military to take full control of the paramilitary groups as they pose a threat to the peace negotiations. His concession of giving cabinet positions to the Left, particularly the departments of Agrarian Reform, Social Welfare and Development, and the National Anti-Poverty Commission augurs well for the national minorities of the country who have long suffered from agrarian inequalities and neglect of basic social services.

President Duterte's bold calls in local and international forums for righting the historical wrongs perpetrated by U.S. imperialism, are historic firsts in the Philippines and in the global stage. He has also brought to the fore the issue of U.S. military troops' presence in Mindanao and its implications on the island's volatile peace as his government makes breakthroughs with formal peace negotiations with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines and is initiating the same for various Moro revolutionary groups.

National minorities believe that Duterte's pronouncements upholding an independent foreign policy is treading the right path towards asserting the right to self-determination of indigenous peoples and the Moro people, and defending the national sovereignty and patrimony. His words, however, should actually translate into the abrogation of lopsided international treaties with the United States such as the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT).

However, national minorities would need to engage the new administration to come up with policies that correctly address their political marginalization. Duterte's push for a federal form of government that does not lead to the restructuring of policy and institutional roots of national oppression will merely add to the bogus autonomy frameworks resorted to by previous regimes and perpetuate the historical injustices suffered by minorities.

Lakbayan ng Pambansang Minorya 2016

The continuing and intensifying attack on the lives and rights of the Moro and indigenous peoples have propelled both peoples to unite and spark a movement to defend their land, identity, the right to self-determination, and in pursuit of national liberation.

Historically, the Moro and indigenous peoples were at the forefront of armed resistance to Spanish and American colonization. They have entered into several peace pacts to resolve their boundary and internal conflicts in order to fight their common enemy.

During Martial Law, national minorities took center stage in the struggle against the Marcos Dictatorship as the assassination of Kalinga leader Macli-ing Dulag united the Cordillera people and the rest of the Filipino people in resisting the imperialist-funded Chico Dam.

In the recent past, national minorities were galvanized in the movement to push for genuine regional autonomy in the crafting of the 1987 Constitution. They were further united in national movements and formations that commonly promote indigenous and Moro peoples' rights particularly amid the backdrop of internal security policies (Oplan Bantay Laya), regional free trade agreements (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation [APEC] and Association of Southeast Asian Nations [ASEAN]), and U.S. interventionism and militarism (Balikatan exercises, EDCA/VFA).

Under former President Noynoy Aquino, the attacks on the Lumad people pushed for national minorities to intensify peoples' resistance through a protest caravan popularized as Manilakbayan ng Mindanao. In 2015, a protest caravan of indigenous peoples from Cordillera, Northern and Central Luzon dubbed as "Salubungan ng mga Katutubong Mamamayan" merged with the Manilakbayan ng Mindanao as part of the nationwide protest against the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation meet in Manila.

National minorities need to push the new administration to take a clear stand against policies and laws that seek to continue and intensify attacks on the lives, rights and resistance of national minorities against plunder of their resources and militarization of their communities.

They are embarking on the first-ever *Lakbayan ng Pambansang Minorya para sa Sariling Pagpapasya at Makatarungang Kapayapaan*, October 13-28, 2016.

Around 3,000 indigenous peoples and Moro from various parts of the country will set up camp in the University of the Philippines-Diliman Campus to bring attention to our plight and our calls in the national capital.

The *Lakbayan ng Pambansang Minorya* calls on the [President Rodrigo] Duterte government to put an end to the militarization and plunder of our lands and territories. At the same time, it supports its positive actions towards upholding the rights of national minorities, calling for the ouster of US troops and installations, and pursuing peace talks with the National Democratic Front and the Moro revolutionary groups.

OBJECTIVES

The *Lakbayan ng Pambansang Minorya* 2016 aims to:

1. Build deeper understanding and unity among national minorities in the Philippines and form an alliance and movement to assert their right to self-determination and national liberation;
2. Press the Duterte government to stop the ethnocentric fascist attacks on the rights, lands, and territories of Moro and indigenous peoples communities;
3. Exact accountability from the BS Aquino regime for the numerous extrajudicial killings of national minorities and other peoples' rights violations during his term;
4. Assert the National Minorities peace agenda in the Government of the Philippines (GPH)-National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) peace negotiations and in peace processes with Moro revolutionary groups;
5. Demand the abrogation of lopsided treaties, the ouster of U.S. troops and installations, and the accountability of U.S. imperialism for the historical injustices against the Moro and indigenous peoples, and support Duterte's declaration of promoting an independent foreign policy; and
6. Raise awareness and generate support from various sectors and groups in the National Capital Region to channel solidarity to Moro and indigenous peoples communities.

Components

- **Protest Caravan.** The Moro and Lumad will be taking off from major cities and provinces in Mindanao on October 8 to mark the first 100 days of the Duterte government. They will converge with support groups in Eastern Visayas and Bicol, and will be welcomed by the congress of indigenous peoples of Southern Tagalog. The Cordillera and other indigenous peoples of Northern Luzon will converge with their Central Luzon counterparts. All 3,000 of the delegates, including the Tumandok of Panay, will meet with urban sectors and support groups in the National Capital Region.
- **Kampuhan sa UP Diliman.** The delegates will pitch camp at the University of the Philippines Diliman where a Salubungan will be held by the UP community and thereafter receive the delegates in a series of classroom discussions, cultural exchange, sports fests, and other activities. UP Diliman will be a venue for immersions and visits from schools, churches, communities and organizations all over Metro Manila.
- **Alliance of National Minorities.** A formal alliance of national minorities all over the Philippines will hold an assembly and will be launched during a two-day conference. The alliance formation and conference will focus on an analysis of national oppression, the peace talks, and ways for national minorities to move forward and address issues and problems that confront them.
- **Lobbying and Dialogues.** A series of pickets, lobbying, and dialogues with the relevant government agencies will be staged in order to seek redress for local issues and problems confronting national minorities, press for social services, and demand accountability for human rights violations. The protests will also focus on pressing for an independent foreign policy in support of the Duterte government's stand to uphold the national sovereignty.
- **Cultural Festivals.** Various cultural performances and exchanges will be featured in the Kampuhan and in off-campus venues. This includes the Museo Lumad, Moro at Katutubo exhibition at the UP Diliman grounds, various benefit concerts and cultural events, cultural presentation of Moro and indigenous groups including children of the Save Our Schools network. These also include daily Solidarity Nights from October 16 to 21, and another culminating solidarity night on October 27. Students and other sectors are also welcome to engage in various forms of cultural exchanges such as interacting through dance, music, bead-making, etc. The Gawad Agong awards for media promoting indigenous peoples reporting and coverage will also be held.
- **Peace Forum.** National Minorities will promote the National Minorities Peace Agenda to the Philippine government and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines in a peace forum at the Kampuhan grounds.