

# **Lumad Struggle for Ancestral Domain and Self-Governance in the ARMM**

Saturday 3 March 2007, by [BANDARA Alim M.](#) (Date first published: 11 December 2006).

**Contribution presented to the Asia People's Assembly at the occasion of the ASEAN meeting in the Philippines (to take place in Cebu, but postponed at the last minute).**

By: TIMUAY LABI ALIM M. BANDARA

Greetings!

The subject of my presentation is "Lumad Struggle for Ancestral Domain and Self-governance in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM)." To me, this is an expression of building a community of caring and sharing society in the local level.

But before going further, let me say very briefly that the Lumad people are non Muslim Indigenous Peoples in Mindanao and some of them are included in the ARMM area without due recognition of their traditional territories and tribal based self-governance. Moreover, portions of their ancestral domain areas were awarded by the government to logging concessionaires in the ARMM. Today, the logging operation is still going on in seven (7) tribal barangays in Upi, Maguindanao of the ARMM.

If indeed this is peace in the ARMM, I say that we the Lumads paid a high price for the peace in this part of the region. I therefore call on government officials to recognize the ancestral domain claims and system of self-governance practices of the Lumads in the ARMM.

But despite all these problems, we remained faithful in a peaceful way of protecting our ancestral domain territory and the century old system of tribal self-governance. In doing so, we honestly abide by the procedures on filing ancestral domain claims based on the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) at the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) national office but still pending at the Ancestral Domains Office (ADO) of the NCIP to the present.

On the ground level, we kept on consolidating our tribal based self-governance we called today the Timuay Justice and Governance (TJG). We were able to re-install the Baglalan or tribal title holders in the village level with the Ukit, Tegudon and Dowoy or tribal customary laws fully codified now as the governing laws in tribal governance.

And to protect our forestlands, we conducted a Tribal March to Defend the Forest in April 7-12, 2006 other than dialogues with local government officials. This was attended by more than seven hundred regular tribal marchers and more than 1,000 participants in every municipal stop over areas of the seventy five (75) kilo meters walk. Another tribal approach to stop the logging is the implementation of the Teduray and Lambangian Biodiversity Conservation Project in Upi funded by the United Nations Development Program; Global Environment Facility and Small Grants Program, Philippines (UNDP-GEF-SGP).

In summary, all our efforts even how little they may be are directed towards the consolidation of the

different tradition of tribal governance in the ARMM. This is our only way to establish safety measures to protect the people in our villages and communities. Along this line, we, the tribal chieftains called for FEGERANG. This is a traditional call addressed to all people in a community, from children and youth to men, women and the elderly. Traditionally, this is a call for battle. But today, we translated it to a call for UNITY to stand guard over our century old common tradition in community building.

And just recently, we discovered that there are six-point commonalities in our customs and traditions. We believed that the discovery is spiritually inspired because none in our history that we, the Lumad people of Mindanao are governed in one umbrella organization. It is only today we found that we have the same roots and that this can be the basis of our unity in defense of our ancestral domain territory and are also useful tool in determining our own version of development and in building a community of caring and sharing society. Now may I present these development frameworks for consideration when linking these group of people with ASEAN leaders, and are as follows:

1. Development should ensure that we are not distanced from our close connection to nature. Development that threatens to destroy nature and remove us from our lands is not acceptable because nature is the basic sources of our livelihood ranging from food, medicine, shelter including our customs and tradition. Because of this, nature is considered the extension of our life and body.
2. Development should ensure that collective forms of leadership and decision making are respected. We particularly abhor attempts by large corporations to get way through divide and rule enticements aimed at individuals in our society. Development process must respect the need to group consultation so that we can determine by consensus what the whole community desires.
3. Development should ensure that communal ownership of property is not threatened. This includes the communal ownership of the land, hunting and fishing grounds; worship places and other major source of economy in the community for no one have the sole control over the product of mother earth. We use these resources in-order to live a human life.
4. Development should ensure that equal status in society is preserve. We reject development that elevates some individuals into prestigious and powerful positions at the expense of others in the community. We value every individual in our community irrespective of life chances that may have come their way for advance education, employment and so on. Thus we reject development that values one human being over another for, we, the children of mother earth are equal.
5. Development should ensure that the good fedew remains the basis of justice and development. Good fedew is the presence of a good feeling, peace of mind and the physical well being of every individual member of the community. This is the strongest foundation of peace, justice and development in tribal society. Any undertaking that runs counter to the "good fédew" is not good development.
6. Finally, development should ensure that lumut minanga or progressive pluralism is maintained and enhanced. Development should be respectful of all people including the tri-people neighbors of Mindanao like the Bangsamoro people, the Christian majority Filipinos and the Lumads.

Thank you.