

# Philippines: Group defends Bayan Muna solon vs NCIP-backed tribe leaders

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**“The NCIP’s so-called ‘datus’ vaguely label Rep. Cullamat’s participation in the protest as a ‘disrespectful act.’ We ask these datus: how is speaking in a peaceful protest action ‘disrespectful?’ How is the exercise of one’s democratic rights a rational basis for banning an elected representative from her own ancestral community?”**

MANILA - Indigenous peoples group Sandugo - Movement of Moro and Indigenous Peoples for Self-Determination scored the League of Caraga Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representatives (LCIPMR) for declaring Bayan Muna Rep. Eufemia Cullamat “persona non grata” in ancestral domains of the Manobo, Mamanwa, Mandaya, Higaonon and Banwaon indigenous cultural communities.

In a statement, Sandugo noted that the LCIPMR issued the resolution Cullamat joined a protest in front of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) central office in Quezon City to commemorate the first month of the Tumandok massacre on Jan. 29.

The LCIPMR in its resolution claimed that Cullamat led the protest at the NCIP and that it was a “mere propaganda.”

Sandugo clarified that Cullamat, a Manobo, was among the speakers in the protest action organized by Sandugo and Katribu where they called for NCIP’s accountability over the death of the nine Tumandok killed on Dec. 30 last year.

“The NCIP’s so-called ‘datus’ vaguely label Rep. Cullamat’s participation in the protest as a ‘disrespectful act.’ We ask these datus: how is speaking in a peaceful protest action ‘disrespectful?’ How is the exercise of one’s democratic rights a rational basis for banning an elected representative from her own ancestral community?” the group said in a statement.

Sandugo that the “manipulation of the LCIPMR has produced this shamelessly self-serving resolution, defending the NCIP instead of its constituents.”

The group added that in many circumstances, the NCIP played a major role in what they call as massive sell-out of ancestral lands to give way to the Jalaur Mega Dam, a project which will displace 17,000 of the Tumandok tribe and residents in the nearby area.

The NCIP, they said, even issued a statement saying that the victims were not even indigenous Tumandok.

## **Links with the military**

Sandugo said that one of the signatories of the said resolution, Rico Maca, is known to have connections with a paramilitary group led by a certain Hasmin Acevedo in barangays Umalag,

Saigao, Caromata in San Miguel, Surigao del Sur.

The group said Maca used to join patrol missions of the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion Philippine Army.

“He does not belong to any datu bloodline, nor was he officially handpicked by the community. He only declared himself a ‘datu’ with the backing of the NCIP, along with Marcial Belandres, known perpetrator of the killing of Lumad leader Henry Alameda,” the group revealed.

Sandugo added that Maca is also known for using this fake designation as a means to acquire a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title, so he may operate a small-scale gold mine in Umalag. “They represent not community aspirations, but selfish interests,” Sandugo added.

### **Cullamat, genuine representative**

Sandugo also reiterated that Cullamat is a genuine representative of the indigenous peoples fighting for their right to self-determination and protection of ancestral lands.

The resolution claimed that Cullamat does represent indigenous peoples of the Caraga region.

Cullamat was elected as third nominee of Bayan Muna in the 2019 elections. The red-tagged party-list group has earned more than two million votes which qualifies it for six seats in the present Congress.

Sandugo believed that Cullamat’s commitment to serve indigenous peoples “extends to the Tumandok in Panay, the Igorot of the Cordilleras, the Moro people of Mindanao, and other minority groups in the Philippines.”

They added that Cullamat “witnessed the repression of paramilitary and soldiers during the Lianga Massacre. She expressed her opposition to various government and corporate intrusions on IP lands. Her legitimacy as a Lumad leader was strengthened when she was elected to Congress.”

“She remains courageous amidst red-tagging of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC). She continues to hold on to her commitment to fight, even while grieving for the death of her daughter Jevilyn, a victim of AFP’s violation to the International Humanitarian Law. Her track record and her persistence in speaking truth to power are clear testaments to her commitment to indigenous people’s rights,” they added.

The group challenged the NCIP to stand with them “in defense of our environment, and our basic human rights. If the NCIP continues to refuse to do this, then it has no reason to exist.”

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### **Anne Marxze Umil**

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