

Philippines: Lumad leader reacts on claims of CPP ploy: Our struggle is historical

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DAVAO CITY, Philippines — PASAKA Confederation of Lumad Organizations in Mindanao and Salugpongan Ta Tanu Igkanugon deputy secretary general Datu Benito Bay-ao chided at the claim of former PASAKA secretary general Jong Monzon that the Lumad struggle is a ploy of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).

Bay-ao, also the spokesperson of Save Our Schools (SOS) Network, said the indigenous people's advocacy is a historical struggle not even the CPP can claim they invented it.

He said, "*Sa wala pa mi gipanganak, nakigbisog na ang among mga katigulangan. Naay uban nila na nahimong ulipon* (Long before we were born, our ancestors have fought for our lands, some of our clans subjugated)."

Monzon surrenders

Monzon together with other lumad leaders PASAKA vice chairperson Mintroso Tumagsa Malibato, 50, and Danny Tiklunay Malibato, 32, surrendered to the 701st Infantry Brigade based in Mati City on March 8, 2022.

Boston town municipal councilor Podit Modista Monzon-Paguyan and Indigenous Peoples Municipal Representative (IPMR) JP Lampig facilitated the surrender of Monzon, and the two Malibatos.

Monzon claimed in a video press conference on March 15 that the CPP imposed on PASAKA to talk of human rights violations the members of the AFP in lumad communities have committed to get support from international communities and universities.

He also claimed that Lumad school volunteer teachers Chad Booc and Jurain Ngoho, who were [killed](#) by the military last February 24 while doing a survey of Lumad schools in New Bataan, were New People's Army members.

But Bay-ao believed out that Monzon and other Lumad leaders may have issued such statements contrary to their advocacy in the past years as they are now in the hands of the military.

Harassment continues

Bay-ao said he and Monzon were evacuees at UCCP Haran compound in Davao City in 2015.

Monzon's community in Davao Oriental and those from Kapalong and Talaingod in Davao del Norte and the towns of San Fernando and Kitaotao in Bukidnon shared similar tales of schools and projects under attack by the military and members of these communities accused as New People's Army (NPA) rebels.

“We sought help at UCCP Haran because we wanted to continue the schools that we have established in our communities. We evacuated because we were targeted by military attacks. Individuals and communities are targeted, treated like criminals and red-tagged,” Bay-ao said.

The Talaingod community stayed the longest in Haran for six years before deciding to return during the pandemic last year between July to August. But Bay-ao and other leaders opted to stay in sanctuaries as they continue to face threats from the paramilitary.

But Bay-ao said those who returned to their communities have told them they were forced to report to military detachments, fill up surrender forms to receive assistance.

“Most of the Lumad who stayed in Haran surrendered for fear of their lives as seen in 2015 Lianga massacre. This is also because of red-tagging those who struggle for their right to ancestral domain as NPA members,” Bay-ao said, referring to the incident in Lianga, Surigao del Sur where the paramilitary murdered two Lumad village leaders and the school director.

Bay-ao said that the surrender does not guarantee safety at all as the military would continue to monitor and prohibit those who surrendered to go back to their communities.

“I doubt, if they received the monetary assistance promised to them. If they did, would it be enough to sustain them and the next generation. Would it answer the long term solutions to our struggle?” he said.

Bay-ao cited the encampment of military forces in Barangay Nalubas in Talaingod town has barred residents there including Salugpongan council member Datu Tungig Mansimuy-at to go out for work fearing they’d be shot by the military.

Church people charged

He is also saddened with what the government has done to the church who took them in at Haran.

Bishop Hamuel Tequis of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) Southeastern Mindanao Jurisdiction Area, Reverend Daniel Palicte, Ephraim Malazarte, Lindy Trenilla and Grace Avila are facing charges on child abuse, exploitation, and discrimination.

They have posted bail after the Regional Trial Court (RTC) Branch 12 presiding Judge Dante Baguio issued warrant of their arrest on April 21, 2021.

Monzon is also included in the charge, but did not post bail. He has also been red-tagged in social media pages that are linked to the military and in posters spread all over Davao City.

Bay-ao was [among the 26 people rounded up](#) in what authorities call a “rescue operation” of Lumad minors from a retreat house inside the University of San Carlos (USC) Talamban campus in Cebu City on February 15, 2021.

In May 2021, Bay-ao is one of the “Bakwit School 7” cleared for kidnapping and serious illegal detention, human trafficking, and child abuse by the Davao del Norte Provincial Prosecutor due to insufficiency of evidence, lack of probable cause, and for being outside the office’s territorial jurisdiction.

Bay-ao said they face odds in this struggle for their rights as indigenous peoples ever since the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) formed in 2018 intensified the red-tagging, closure of schools, filing of trumped up charges and now coercing

Lumad to speak up against their advocacy.

“The Lumads are pitted by the government against each other. It has continued to divert our struggle to ancestral domain and education. The government does not recognize our rights,” he said.

Bay-ao said the actual experiences of Lumad of landgrabbing, displacement and discrimination have led their tribes to assert their inherent rights and struggle for self determination. No one, not even Monzon whose dad was martyred in 2009 can claim that this struggle is imagined, false or scripted.

He added that just like in history when some of their leaders betrayed their tribes and were coopted, another set of young leaders will rise up.

“This is because the struggle remains valid for as long as the conditions of indigenous peoples’ oppression persists,” Bay-ao said.

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