

In celebration of the indigenous mountain woman

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When we speak of mountain women in the Cordillera region in northern Philippines, we speak of the Igorot women who tamed the mountains as their homelands; the custodians of rich knowledge and innovations that has sustained us for generations. Our grandmothers who aside from patiently tending to our *uma* (swidden farms) would walk through forest growths to collect fuel wood, edible and medicinal materials carefully ensuring that something is left for other gatherers tomorrow.

They taught us how to give birth even if alone in the fields; how to process nature's resources to get back our strength while nurturing our children. They taught us to read and understand the signs in nature; how to make the *tapuy* (traditional rice wine), sing the *sallidummay* (a traditional song) and dance the *tadek* among others.

We speak of the traditional peace sentries braving the odds of mediating between our warring tribes and we continue to revitalize on this passion in our present struggles in defense of the Igorot's land, life and dignity. The women who were pushed to the limit and took up arms against an oppressive state and all other women equally combating oppression and poverty in various forms and fora. The countless indigenous women of Abra, Kalinga, Ifugao, Benguet, Apayao and Bontok who became victims of rape, dislocation, harassment and other human rights violations brought about by militarization and development aggression.

We speak of the Bontok women who bared their breasts to prevent their environment and mineral resources from commercial exploitation by a mining company. In Bontok, women baring breasts in front of men are an affront to the latter's dignity.

We speak of the Benguet Kankanaey women, who, with their children and grandchildren in tow bravely confronted the police, military and mine personnel in protest of the rape of their residential and agricultural lands through massive open pit mining.

We speak of the Ibaloy women of Benguet: Of *Nanang* (mother) Bining and her neighbors along the Agno river who hauled rocks and rolled them down a mountain slope to prevent the entry of a survey team into Dalupirip - the cite of a proposed megahydroelectric dam project in 1951. The proposed dam threatens to inundate their ancestral lands. Their daughters and granddaughters have also successfully opposed the same project revived in the 1970s. Today it has been resurrected as the San Roque Multipurpose Dam Project funded by the Japan Bank of International Cooperation.

We speak of the Kalinga women who bravely dismantled the tents of the National Power Corporation employees in the campaign to stop the construction of the World Bank funded Chico River Dam project which threatened their rights to their ancestral land, resources and self-determination:

We speak of the traditional wine makers: our mothers in Besao, Sagada, Mabaca, Lubuagan and elsewhere who bonded together to vigilantly police drinking and gambling in our communities or set up road blocks to prevent delivery of liquor into the community or lobbied local governments to impose liquor ban earning the ire of their husbands, brothers, local business and authorities. Drunkenness and gambling have impacted unfavorably on our village and family relations as well as in our values and culture.

We speak of those women willing to risk their lives and limbs overseas because of unjust and socio-economically impoverished conditions in most rural and mountain areas in the country. Thousands of Cordillera women are deployed yearly to find employment overseas creating a void in their families and villages back home. Called the "new economic heroes" these women have ensured their families' access to their basic needs and services amidst countless injustices and abuses they get from their employers.

- They are Felicidad Til-adan of Itogon, Benguet came home in a coffin; her internal organs missing. Likewise, Ely Rose Miguel's alleged suicide in Taiwan has still to be explained.

When we speak of mountain women, we speak of our Aeta, Lumad and Moro sisters and call to mind other indigenous women worldwide whose mountain homelands are the remaining sources of rich cultural and biological diversity. The mountain and indigenous women who are the repositories of vital knowledge, innovations and practices urgently needed in today's fast deteriorating natural environment. All these, our and our children's lives have been negatively impacted by development aggression as the wheels of liberalized trade slowly tramples on what is left for our survival.

Today, as we celebrate our being and our strengths, we also claim our human and indigenous rights and fundamental freedoms. In doing so, we demand our

governments, the United Nations and other intergovernmental bodies, donor agencies, development organizations, the academe, our sisters and brothers worldwide to recognize, promote and work together towards the full realization of our rights and interests as indigenous women in the mountain regions. Let us not only raise our voices! We deserve more than being heard! Let us strengthen our linkages to mobilize action. For the indigenous mountain women, we seek action on the following areas :

1. ON LEGAL, POLITICAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS

- A. To fully recognize the rights of women, promote and enhance their role and contribution in all spheres and sectors of society, international and intergovernmental bodies and states should act on the calls for equality, peace and sustainable development from all levels and sectors of society embodied in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and the Declaration on the Right to Development among others and ratify existing policies like the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms Of Racial Discrimination among others. States should further institute policy and structural reforms consistent to the promotion and protection of the rights and welfare of all women relative to their particular situations.
- B. In upholding indigenous women's rights, our human and indigenous rights and fundamental freedoms should be recognized. In doing so, states and other intergovernmental/international bodies should ratify the ILO Convention 169 and recognize and adopt the Draft Declaration of Indigenous Peoples' Rights.
- C. We reiterate the Indigenous Women's Caucus Recommendations to the Beijing + 5 as we will vigilantly review, monitor and exact our government's commitments to women in the Beijing Platform for Action. Mountain women's situations should also be assessed in relation further to the recently concluded WSSD.
- D. Special attention should be given to women in conflict areas. States should see to the strict compliance to international human rights instruments particularly those pertaining to the civilian population and the very vulnerable sectors of women and children. The United Nations bodies and humanitarian agencies should strictly monitor human rights and welfare situations in conflict areas and set up mechanisms to effect immediate security and relief to affected civilian populations. States should facilitate the immediate prosecution of human rights violators and those involved in war crimes. Only in a state of justice and peace can we attain sustainable development in the mountain regions. It is

therefore imperative for governments and concerned groups to ensure peace by effectively addressing peoples' grievances that has evolved or may erupt into violent conflict.

- E. Institutionalize education and information for mountain women on the basic human rights, women's and indigenous peoples' rights and fundamental freedoms. We will continue to work in partnership with interested parties to discourage tradition and culture that impinge on our rights and freedoms.
- F. Regulation and strict implementation of equitable and just labor laws as provided under international labor and human rights instruments;
- G. Ensure mountain women's participation in all matters and processes affecting their persons, families, communities/nations, rights and interests and in all levels and sectors of governance, administration, and management.

2. ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

- A. As rich repositories of traditional knowledge, innovations and skills in sustainable natural resource management states should enact policies recognizing and securing the rights of indigenous peoples to their ancestral lands, the resources thereon and self-determination and the right of women to own land and property. Indigenous peoples should themselves recognize the right and fundamental freedom of women to own and manage land and property.
- B. We demand a stop to all research and development activities and external initiatives in our mountain homelands that aggress on our rights to own, manage and develop our resources in a mutually acceptable manner that we ourselves determine.
 - o States should declare a moratorium to plan large scale extractive activities and stop existing ones in mountain regions that threaten vast biological and cultural diversity unless issues of ownership, free and prior informed consent, benefit sharing, restitution and equitable compensation are resolved. Corporate accountability and cultural impact assessment should be mandated in all development initiatives.
 - o Governments should enable the strict monitoring against bioprospecting and biopiracy. Heavy penalties should be adopted to ultimately discourage said practice. Governments should be critical of international agreements and commitments that may compromise these.
 - o Biodiversity and nature conservation/protection programs have negatively impacted our disenfranchisement and isolated us from

the material bases of our economic and socio-cultural niches. As the primary stewards of our upland environment, we call for a reorientation and restructuring of these biodiversity conservation cum protection programs that railroads our rights, knowledge and capacities. Governments should instead come up with policies and programs that will enable mountain communities, especially women, to strengthen their best practices while developing other more appropriate, site and culture specific conservation-protection models.

- In view of this year's being the Year of the Mountain coinciding with the announced Year of Ecotourism, we demand a stop to the promotion of ecotourism in indigenous mountain areas which result to the commercialization and bastardization of our culture and identities in the name of income and "development". Any kind of tourism or "development" that comes with it in indigenous mountain areas should be defined and approved by the indigenous mountain communities concerned and their right to reject external intervention/initiatives should be recognized.
- C. The UN, governments, the academe and development agencies in close coordination and partnership with mountain communities should design rights-based approaches to development in fragile and indigenous mountain environments and communities under the principles of gender and cultural sensitivity, appropriate technology, transparency and public accountability, local consultation and participation, free and prior informed consent and respect for human and indigenous rights among others;

3. CULTURE AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

- A. Enable the promotion, protection and further development of the knowledge and innovations we have learned from our experiences in our mountain homelands without prejudice to our collective rights to own and benefit from our knowledge and innovations;
- B. Ensure cultural survival and diversity through culturally sensitive and pluralist models of education and development;
- C. Build capacities of mountain women to document, impart and innovate on indigenous culture, knowledge, practices and technologies without prejudice to common property regimes and collective rights to ownership and equitable benefits;
- D. Ensure sustainable development through peace building and genuine poverty reduction programs in the purview of people's empowerment. Poverty reduction and food security among mountain and indigenous women and their communities entails the recognition of their rights to

own, manage and control their land and resources. Traditional knowledge and innovations should instead be strengthened and traditional plant varieties protected from erosion, extinction and piracy that may result from global commercial production.

4. HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- A. Governments should increase access and delivery of basic social and enabling services in remote mountain and indigenous areas especially with respect to health, education and food security.
- B. Governments should increase subsidy for the development of viable and sustainable livelihood programs in mountain areas, strengthening of existing traditional regimes, knowledge and innovations by women especially in the realms of health care, traditional medicine and agriculture.
- C. Prostitution and trafficking, whether by force or choice, have become "alternative" income sources among socio-economically deprived women. While we may not be able to fully halt prostitution and trafficking, governments, donor and development agencies should maximize their efforts and resources in genuinely addressing poverty. Partnerships with mountain communities should be established to institutionalize capacity building in the purview of women and community empowerment.
- D. We demand a stop to gender-violence and oppression from both the traditional and contemporary structures and relations. We will continue to build alliances within and outside our communities to discourage traditional customs and practices that impinge on our full development as human beings and as women.

5. ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- A. Entrepreneurship should be founded on the respect for culture and identity and socio-economic and environmental sustainability not on mere profit. Culture and identity should not be compromised in the name of art, freedom of expression and profit.
- B. Provide mountain and indigenous women better access to credit, markets, technology transfer, training and capacity building opportunities in the following fields:
 - o knowledge and skills development
 - o organizing and linkages/networking/alliance building
 - o access to information and appropriate technology
 - o technical : product development, marketing and market negotiation, finance and program management, organizational development, etc.
- C. Governments should institute support programs and mechanisms for the full development of mountain and indigenous women entrepreneurs. This

includes non-commitment to any local, national or international trade and commerce agreement that may compromise the latter's position.

Finally, we ask the Year of the Mountains to provide resources for mountain women to strengthen their ranks and networks through further dialogue, consultation and participation in all national, regional and international concerns or initiatives affecting them as women and their mountain homelands.

We uphold our recent victory in the WSSD reaffirming our vital roles in sustainable development. Today, we bond as women from all areas of the universe and all walks of life to celebrate. Let this celebration commence the fulfillment of our struggles for equitable sustainable development!....

Notes to readers

This paper was presented at the Celebrating Mountain Women Conference and Bishek Global Mountain Summit, 2002.

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