

MIDENG! Kitamu Ha Lutang Ninuno: The persistence of militarization and political persecution against the Indigenous Aetas of Zambales.

Target Date: 5 December 2020 (Saturday) | 4:00 - 6:00 PM

Hosted by: Umahon Gitnang Luzon, Indigenous Peoples Rights International (IPRI), Kabataan para sa Tribung Pilipino (KATRIBU Youth)

Sign-up Link: <http://bit.ly/Mideng-webinar>

Background / Rationale

The Aytas of Central Luzon live simple lives. For them, land is life, that's why they are engaged in collective farming and living. Despite the rich natural resources in their lands, the Aytas, along with all other indigenous groups in the country, remain in the poorest sector of the society. They are victims, not only of calamities, but also of social inequality and injustice.

Throughout, the Aetas managed to persist and preserve their rich ancestral domain. Aside from fertile grounds and bodies of water, their vast mountainous areas hold copious wealth in minerals. In fact, in over 20 years of Benguet Mines Incorporated's operation in San Marcelino, Zambales, they have profusely extracted millions of tons of ores from the mountains.

Despite this, the Aeta people did not benefit from the operations, and instead, suffered from the ill effects of the extractive and negligent mining in the area three decades after the shutdown of Benguet Mines. The bodies of water surrounding the communities became lethal due to the chemical wastes of the mining activity. This in turn, destroyed their crops, damaged their land, and made several people from the community ill.

This tragic experience motivated the Aetas to defend their lands from all attempts of plunder. Last 2015, the united indigenous communities victoriously stopped the Aboitiz corporation and its geothermal project from operating in Zambales. This victory, however, did not stop other companies from threatening Aeta's ancestral lands as the Dizon Copper-Silver Mines Inc. attempted to launch a mining exploration this year.

Amidst the pandemic, Aeta communities once more forged unities among their people to stop the attempt of the mining exploration in San Marcelino. However, their momentous union was disturbed by intensified militarization. Last August 21, a military operation led by the combined 703rd Reconnaissance Brigade and 48th Infantry Battalion under the 7th Infantry Division of the Philippine Army brought terror to the Aeta community of Sitio Lumibao, Brgy. Buhawen, San Marcelino, Zambales. Justifying the attack as an act of pursuing members of the New People's Army, the military dropped bombs on the ancestral land that coerced the community to evacuate. The incident affected 695 individuals (or 192 families).

Aside from the bombing incident, four Aetas, widely known as the Lumibao 4, were accused of being members of the New People's Army (NPA) and are now facing trumped-up charges, two of which are male farmers detained at the Olongapo City Jail, and the other two are female minors detained at the DSWD Safe Haven for Girls. The two males narrated what transpired during their illegal capture such as torture, force-feeding of feces, etc. The criminal charges filed against them include illegal possession of firearms and ammunitions, illegal possession of explosives, and for the two males, the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 (RA 11479). It is important to note that the first publicly known criminal charge(s) of RA 11479 in the Philippines is imposed on Indigenous Aeta. At present, militarization thrives in the community in the guise of socio-civic programs. Reports from locals state that intensive surveillance and "psywars" on the Aeta persist to this day.

Given this, we, together with IPRI, Umahon, church people, human rights advocates, and many others are fervently calling for the immediate release of our Ayta friends, Jepoy Garung, Rosalyn Urbano, Kiray Serrano at Jr Ramos, and for a swift investigation into the recent military operation which led to the bombings of the ancestral lands of the Aytas in San Marcelino Zambales. We are also calling for help from the Justice department, Supreme Court, Commission on Human Rights, and other government agencies that are mandated to uphold human rights.

The Indigenous Peoples Rights International (IPRI), Ugnayan ng Mamamayan para sa Lupa, Kabuhayan, at Hustisyang Panlipunan (People's Network for Land, Livelihood, and Social Justice/UMAHON) Central Luzon, and Kabataan para sa Tribung Pilipino (KATRIBU) aim to launch a webinar to discuss the current state of Aeta communities, particular in Zambales, who are experiencing the threats of mining and militarization and to expound on the case of the Lumibao 4.

CALLS:

Free Lumibao 4!
Junk Terror Law!
Stop the Attacks!
No to Militarization!
Defend the Aetas!
Defend Ancestral Lands!
Stop criminalization of Indigenous Peoples!
Respect Indigenous Peoples Rights!

HASHTAGS:

#FreeLumibao4
#JunkTerrorLaw
#StopTheAttacks
#DefendTheAetas
#WeAreIndigenous

Objectives

The webinar has three objectives:

1. To discuss the condition of the Aetas in San Marcelino, Zambales and gain support from the participating individuals and organizations:
 - a. The extractive and negligent mining operations that threatened and continues to threaten the Aeta people from their community;
 - b. The militarization and bombing incident at Barangay Buhawen, San Marcelino, that affected 600 individuals last August 21, 2020, and;
 - c. The trumped-up charges against the Lumibao 4 comprising of two male farmers and female minors; the former being the first publicly charged individuals of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020.
2. To share the voices from the ground – testimonies from the victim, the legal counsel, and community advocate.

Speaker / Reactors

Prince Albert Solomon Turtogo

Prince Turtogo is the current Philippine Coordinator of the Indigenous Peoples Rights International and the former National Capital Region Chairperson of Kabataan para sa Tribung Pilipino (KATRIBU Youth), a youth organization that supports the plight of the Indigenous and Moro people for the rights to ancestral lands and self-determination.

Giya Clemente

Giya Clemente is a rural poor community organizer in Central Luzon and the Coordinator of UMAHON Central Luzon. She advocates peasant, fisherfolks, and indigenous peoples' rights by spearheading various campaigns such as the Save Taliptip Campaign in Bulacan, and does research and organizing work among landless peasants and displaced IP's in Pampanga and Zambales. She also works as a researcher in the Center for Environmental Studies–CL (CEDS) an NGO leading in environmental campaigns and studies.

Atty. Bonifacio F. Cruz, Jr.

Atty. Bonifacio F. Cruz, Jr. is a human rights lawyer and a member of National Union of Peoples' Lawyers —Central Luzon Chapter. In 2006, he taught at Saint Louis University. and pursued his career as legal consultant and administrator in Orani, Bataan for almost a decade and now he serves as a Municipal Councilor in Orani. At present, he is the lead counsel of the Lumubao 4 Aeta Case in Olongapo City and other political prisoners in Central Luzon.

Mai Taqueban

Mai M. Taqueban works with the Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center-Friends of the Earth Philippines (LRC-FoE PH), a policy, legal and advocacy institution that works for the recognition and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples and communities to land and other natural

resources. She is also a member of the faculty of the Department of Anthropology, University of the Philippines in Diliman.

Reactors

Jon Bonifacio

Jon Bonifacio is a full-time environment activist based in the Philippines. He is the current Education Coordinator of Youth Advocates for Climate Action Philippines and is also the National Spokesperson of Saribuhay, a youth environmental organization.

Mitzi Joelle Tan

Mitzi Jonelle Tan is a climate justice activist based in Metro Manila, Philippines. She is the convenor and international spokesperson of Youth Advocates for Climate Action Philippines (YACAP), an alliance of individuals and youth formations that advocates for immediate, youth-led, and collective global climate action, climate justice, defense of environmental defenders, and system change.

Hon. Sarah Elago

Hon. Sarah Jane Elago is a Filipino activist and politician representing the youth, under Kabataan Partylist, in the House of Representatives. She is known as the youngest female legislator of Congress, principal author of the Comprehensive Free Public Higher Education Bill in 2017 which benefits an estimate of two million college students annually. She is the only Filipino to receive the One Young World Politician of the Year 2020, which recognizes the most impactful politicians that use their positions to create change for young people in their communities and countries.

Rev. Estelito M. Binuya Jr.

Rev. Estelito Binuya Jr. Ordained is an Elder of The United Methodist Church and member of Bulacan Philippines Annual Conference. He is the former Chairperson of BulPAC Board of Church and Society, and currently serves as Chaplain of Harris Memorial College.

Beverly Longid

Beverly Longid is the Global Coordinator of International Indigenous Peoples Movement for Self-Determination and Liberation (IPMSDL), a global movement of grassroots-based Indigenous Peoples organizations, communities, and advocates. She is also an International Solidarity Officer of KATRIBU, a national alliance of Indigenous Peoples Organizations in the Philippines.