The following is the unity statement of the Indigenous Peoples Exchange Program 2013. This focused on the threat to ancestral land, culture and the lives of indigenous peoples due to the presence of large companies of mining and oil palm in their communities. The Exchange Program was made possible and successful through the cooperation of the Philippine Task Force for Indigenous Peoples Rights (TFIP), Philippine Traditional Knowledge Network, Tebtebba Foundation, UCCP Integrated Development Program for Indigenous Peoples in Southern Tagalog (UCCP-IDPIP-ST). The participants were hosted by the Pinagtibukan Kaundang-undangan et Palawan-an (PKP) and the Palawan Inter-Tribal Federation (ITF).

UNITY STATEMENT:

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES EXCHANGE PROGRAM 2013

We, the participants of the Indigenous Peoples Exchange Program 2013, from different indigenous groups in the Cordillera, Central Luzon, Palawan, Visayas and Mindanao together with advocate groups, gathered together in Sofronio Española, Palawan to exchange knowledge and experiences with the Palawan people. We observed that indigenous peoples in the Philippines have similar situations and the rich culture is tightly bound to the ancestral land and the environment. Indigenous knowledge and culture, such as customary laws, indigenous livelihood, socio-political systems, health care and natural resource management, are slowly disintegrating. This is due to the dominant culture in society perpetuated by the government, mass media, churches and educational institutions. Recognition of the importance of indigenous culture in the present society is lacking. This may also be attributed to the fact that indigenous peoples are gradually displaced from their ancestral domains.

We learned that the ancestral land of the Palawan people in Española is slowly decreasing in size. This is caused by the titling of the land for non-indigenous settlers coming from different parts of the country. The indigenous peoples lose their ancestral land because they were not used to having these titled to serve as proof of ownership. Moreover, the limited opportunities for titling of ancestral lands have rigorous processes and are costly especially for cash-poor indigenous peoples. This gave way to blatant land grabbing against them.

The situation of the Palawan in Española is worsened by the aggressive entry of destructive projects in their communities. Their farms have decreased due to the widening oil palm plantations and large-scale mining operation of a large foreign company. These have gained access to indigenous territories in the municipality without proper consultation and free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) from the
indigenous peoples who reside there. The activities of these companies (palm oil and mining) caused
destruction to the land and environment without the people benefitting from them. In Barangay Iraray
where huge oil palm plantations are located, some Palawan were given jobs but are given low daily pay
which only covers food expenses for a family for one day and those who had their lands rented are given
a very small amount yearly. In the mining site and stockpiles of Citi Nickel, the mining company
operating in España, some indigenous peoples are also admitted to work but worse, the company and
concerned government agencies did not give the agreed upon 1% royalty to be given to the Palawan people since the start of mining operations. In fact, this 1% can never cover the cost of large scale
mining to the environment and the lives of indigenous peoples as mountains are slowly flattened, rivers
and seas are polluted. These are sources of livelihood and food for the Palawan in España.

These issues are a manifestation of the utter disregard of the rights of indigenous peoples to their
ancestral lands and self-determination. Many of them are forced to give in to the designs of large
companies without any struggle.

But, we fellow indigenous peoples, our organizations and other advocate groups in this exchange
program believe that there is a need for indigenous peoples to stand and assert their rights. Foremost of
these are the rights to ancestral land, free access to livelihood, control of natural resources and a
healthy ecology. In the exchanges we did, we were able to come up with the following general
recommendations:

Expose and prosecute the violations of the human rights and collective rights of indigenous peoples
committed by CitiNickel Mining Corp. and AGUMILL Oil Palm Corporation;
Stop the mining operations of the CitiNickel Mining Corp. in Sofronio España. Junk the Mining Act of 1995 and Enforce the province-wide mining moratorium in Palawan;

Stop the further expansion of oil palm plantations! Defend the rights to land and Struggle for the livelihood of the Palawan people. #