Is Asserting Ancestral Land Rights to Produce Food a Crime?

A Statement on the Senseless Shooting of the Pulangihon Manobo in their Own Ancestral Land

Almost a year has passed since the armed security group of the Rancho Montalvan fired upon the Pulangihon Manobo who installed houses on a piece of their ancestral land in Butong, Quezon, Bukidnon. Almost a year has passed yet the nightmare of that shooting lingers in the minds of the indigenous peoples especially the children. Almost a year has passed, still indigenous peoples are deprived of their rightful claim to the land which they find productive through a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT).

The nightmare came to a worst turn yesterday, March 24, 2015, as another senseless shooting incident resulted to the death of Tata Baito and severe wounding of two other members of the Tribal Indigenous Oppressed Group Association (TINDOGA). The TINDOGA drew the ire of Pablo Lorenzo, owner of Rancho Montalvan, as the group is consistent and firm in asserting their rights to the ancestral land. They are merely exercising their right to produce food in the chosen piece of ancestral land that should be awarded to them.

The CADT, rather than giving hope to TINDOGA members and other Pulangihon Manobo clans to finally control their land, was manipulated leading instead to their dispossession. The land was originally lent by the Pulangihon Manobo to the ancestors of Lorenzo. At present, Rancho Montalvan engages in large scale plantation of pineapples and sugar cane for multinational agricultural corporations. The original CADT application which actually covers the land occupied by Lorenzo was deceptively reduced from more than 600 hectares to just 70 hectares. These 70 hectares is shared by eight groups or clans of Pulangihon including TINDOGA. With this TINDOGA gets only 7 hectares.

However, during the fake installation ceremony held in April last year, the TINDOGA were dismayed when they found that their 7 hectares are mostly stony area which is difficult to cultivate to produce crops for their families. Their strong assertion led to the indiscriminate shooting against them by Rancho Montalvan guards. The incident yesterday is a cruel repetition of what happened last year.
The Philippine Task Force for Indigenous Peoples’ Rights supports the TINDOGA and the Pulangihon Manobo people in Quezon, Bukidnon in their rightful claim to their ancestral land. Pablo Lorenzo and his security group reacted violently and excessively to the indigenous peoples who are merely fulfilling the most important requirement for the ownership of their ancestral land, by working on it and enriching it. The shooting and killing of TINDOGA members and indigenous peoples asserting their rights to ancestral land is despicable. The perpetrators of this act must be punished and prevented from causing chaos in indigenous communities again.

We call on the Philippine National Police (PNP) to apprehend the criminals behind this cruel act. They must not be cowed by the power of guns, goons and riches of the landlord whose only wish is to dominate ancestral land without regard for the massive displacement, violation of the rights and eventual ethnocide of the Pulangihon Manobo in Quezon, Bukidnon.

Justice for Tata Baito! Give to the Pulangihon Manobo what is rightfully theirs! Recognize indigenous peoples’ rights to their ancestral land and self-determination. #