

Threats and Challenges of Globalization to the Lumad People of Mindanao

Saturday 19 August 2006, by [BANDARA Alim M.](#) (Date first published: 7 September 2004).

Paper presented at the fifth Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF), "People's Action for Human Security", which took place in Hanoi (Vietnam) from 6th to 9th September 2004. This contribution was given in Conference Cluster 3: "Dialogue of Civilisations, Cultures and Religions in Europe and Asia".

(Greetings).

The topic I would like to talk is about the "threats and challenges of globalization to the Lumad people of Mindanao" in the context of a tri-people situation in the islands of Mindanao, Philippines. But first, let me explain very briefly who are the tri-people in Mindanao.

The tri-people of Mindanao is composed of the Lumads or indigenous peoples; the Bangsa Moro and the Mindanao settlers or group of people traditionally from the islands of Luzon and the Visayas that settled permanently in Mindanao nowadays. Each group of people is identified with their own cultural beliefs and traditions such as that of the Lumads, known as holder and practitioner of the traditional and primitive way of life to these days; the Bangsa Moro people with their Islamic faith and their own traditional way of life and the settlers with their Christian faith and beliefs historically inherited from their colonial masters.

Among the three groups of people in Mindanao, the Lumads are tagged by the majority of the Filipino people as backward. Their basis in labeling the Lumads as such is the non total submission of the Lumad people to the new forms of civilizations. Their understanding on this situation is that, the none-submission of the Lumad people led them to underdevelopment now. And with globalization now coming our way, more conflict of ideas and interest will definitely be encountered by the tri-people in the process of development.

The case in point now is globalization's assault to nature and the country-sides in Mindanao. To the Lumads, this is an attack to their lives and livelihood while others see this as opportunities for job placement and employment.

Assault to nature is actually the Philippine government's integration program to globalization as defined in the Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and Philippines East Asia Growth Areas or BIMP-EAGA and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation or APEC. This program is relying mainly on the exploitation of Mindanao's rich human and natural resources with the Lumad areas as primary object of operations.

To date, the traditional territories or ancestral domain claims of the Lumad people

in Mindanao are now divided into different Regional Industrial Centers or RICs by the government. In fact, projects such as constructions of transportation routes are now going on; the development of tourist spots in the area; construction and repair of sea and airports; putting up of communication facilities; operation of agro-industrial plantations; mining operations, power stations and the transformation of farm lands into crop and pasture areas for export production and other projects beneficial to global trading. These development projects are now scattered to almost the last square centimeter of the Lumads' ancestral domain claims and continuously destroying to a greater extent the environment and all natural resources therein. In the main, the government now awards the Lumads' ancestral domain claims to Multinational and Transnational Corporations operating in Mindanao.

With all these physical developments, officials of government and passers by in these areas are happy with all what they see but unknown to them and to other people across the globe that part of mother earth in where the Lumads live today are deeply wounded by development. The Lumads felt this badly.

The reasons why the Lumads felt it very badly is that, nature being the source of knowledge, power and life by providing job and employment opportunities to the Lumad people in the olden days are now deformed and controlled by economic chieftains with global trading capabilities. According to Lumad elders, "this is a part of history where the Lumad peoples are put in place of wild games in early history when farm-lots in animal-kingdoms are harvested where these animals posed as merely on-lookers on products taken out of their kingdom".

As a result, the Lumad people in an awkward manner sing the same tune with the working class in hunting job and employment opportunities. But with their traditional skills, like the unemployed working class do today, they also turned urban and rural poor and those who remained steadfast in typical Lumad villages found themselves completely slaves to the command of cash economy.

From these sufferings, there is no way back for the Lumad people. Nowhere is subsistence economy enjoyed by the Lumads for centuries in working with nature. But what is still significant today is their traditional concept of relating to nature which is to maintain fair working relations with her and that all products of labor to the benefit of humanity.

This concept is in fine tune with the struggle of the working class for job security; for fair employee and employer working relations; demand for fair salary and other benefits to the workers.

But what bothers the Lumad people is that they are dealing not with nature or the spirits but with fellow human being now in power but who do not recognize the tribal rituals as messengers of peace, justice and freedom in times of conflicts or at times that there is un-peacefulness, injustices, oppression and exploitation. Gone are the days where rituals and symbols are accepted tools to prevent evil influence in society. In effect, the level of disorder keeps on growing every now and then. And since rituals and tribal symbols are not recognize, we take steps now to transform these into effective tools of negotiation, of dialogue, and of building agents of solidarity, solidarity in vision, in principles and solidarity in action.

It is at this juncture in our history where the presence of the tri-people of Mindanao is accepted by the different sectors in society where we can plant the seeds of unity in diversity. This is a challenge to the tri-people of Mindanao for the road to globalization is now widely open and for those who will oppose or stand on the way of this road will have very limited option to take. They will be crushed or torn into pieces if they will dare to oppose such projects.

The all out war in Mindanao and subsequently the joint US-RP military trainings conducted in western Mindanao and just recently in central Mindanao in the name of anti-terrorist campaigns are the best examples of this global assault to defend and safeguard the interest of globalization in this part of mother earth. This is not however to defend the real terrorists.

Lastly, speaking in behalf of the Lumad people and myself being a Lumad who belong to the Teduray tribe, I admit that we cannot stop globalization and therefore we need to establish safety measures to protect our people in their respective villages and communities for in globalization, admittedly, not that everything is wrong in it. There are good aspects that are also useful in our daily lives. And to go along with it, we demand for the consideration of our traditional knowledge system and practices in the process of development as tribal safety measures and they are as follows:

1. Safeguard the Maintenance of our Closeness to Nature

Development should ensure that we are not distanced from our closeness to nature. Development that threatens to destroy nature and remove us from our lands is not acceptable because nature is the basic sources of our livelihood ranging from food, medicine, shelter and even customs and tradition. Because of this, nature is considered the extension of our life and body.

2. Collective Forms of Leadership

Development should ensure that collective forms of leadership and decision making are respected. We particularly abhor attempts by large corporations to get way through divide and rule enticements aimed at individuals in our society. Development process must respect the need to group consultation so that we can determine by consensus what the whole community desires.

3. Communal Ownership of Sources of Economy

Development should ensure that communal ownership of property is not threatened. This includes the communal ownership of the land, hunting and fishing grounds, worship places and other major source of economy in the community for no one have the sole control over the product of mother earth. We use these resources in-order to live a human life.

4. Equal Status in Society

Development should ensure that equal status in society is preserve. We reject development that elevates some individuals into prestigious and

powerful positions at the expense of others in the community. We value every individual in our community irrespective of life chances that may have come their way for advance education, employment and so on. Thus we reject development that values one human being over another for, we, the children of mother earth are equal.

5. The “good fedew” as Basis of Justice, Peace and Development

Development should ensure that the good fedew remains the basis of justice and development. Good fedew is the presence of a good feeling, peace of mind and the physical well being of every individual member of the community. This is the strongest foundation of peace, justice and development in tribal society. Any undertaking that runs counter to the “kéfiyo fédéw” is not good development.

6. Lumut Minanga or Progressive Pluralism

Finally, development should ensure that progressive pluralism is maintained and enhanced. Development should be respectful of all people including the tri-people neighbors of Mindanao like the Moro people, the Christian majority Filipinos and the Lumads.

The above stated tribal safety measures and tribal guide to development work was formally adapted in the first tribal congress of the Timuay Justice and Governance, a tribal based self-governance of the Teduray and Lambangian in the Autonomoous Region in Muslim Mindanao, Philippines on October 3-5, 2002 at Kansad Gadung, Mt Fakal, Upi, Maguindanao.

Thank you!

P.S.

* Alim M. Bandara is Supreme Chief - Timuay Justice and Governance (Mindanao).