

Mindanao (Philippines): Series of killings of indigenous leaders and attacks against indigenous peoples villages

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Indigenous spiritual leaders prepare the altar for the ritual for peace and justice at Brgy. Emamaling, Magpet, North Cotabato.

At the foot of Mt. Apo, the silence of the early morning was broken by the chants of the *baylans* who led the prayers in a ritual held in Brgy. Emamaling, Magpet, North Cotabato on January 12. The ceremony was attended by the members of the governing council of the Independent Indigenous Peoples' Voice (IPVoice) as well as indigenous peoples' rights advocates who joined the annual ritual of the Ubo Manobo tribe.

Datu Berino Sumilon, a Tinananen leader and the Chairperson of the IPVoice governing council, said that every beginning of the year, indigenous peoples gather together to pray to the *Mananama* (God) for a fruitful and peaceful year. "We asked the Mananama to make our bodies and mind strong enough to defend our rights to our territories which armed groups and companies have been violating for years", he added.

The past years had been difficult for indigenous peoples because of the series of killings of indigenous leaders and attacks against their villages. The instability of the peace processes between the government and the rebel groups made *Lumad* communities into battlegrounds and put their lives at constant risks. Meanwhile, agro-industrial and extractive companies continue to strip their ancestral lands of natural resources with threats of harassment and even death to those who disapprove.

On December 3, 2017, a staunch Lumad rights defender, Datu Victor Danyan, a T'boli leader was killed together with his two sons and son-in-law in a cross-fire between the National [New] Peoples' Army and the government forces in Sitio Datal Bonlangon, Barangay Ned, Lake Sebu, South Cotabato. Days after that incident, thousands of Teduray were forced to flee their homes when the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) launched a series of attacks in indigenous communities in the Mt. Firis complex.

Timuay Leticio Datuwata, a Lambangian and the Chair of the IPVoice peace panel pointed out that the IPVoice governing council consider these acts of violence as a grave violation of indigenous peoples' rights and must be condemned.

"We call on the government to do the best in its power to protect us from being harassed and killed

in our own territories. We also call on the rebel groups and companies to respect our rights and do not involve us in their own interests”, he said.

IPVoice

P.S.

* “IPVoice prays for security against killings, attacks”:

<https://ipvoicemindanao.blogspot.fr/2018/01/ipvoice-prays-for-security-against.html>