MANOBO-PULANGIYON

On 19 April 2022, shots rang out suddenly while Presidential candidate Leody de Guzman spoke with leaders and members of the Manobo-Pulangiyon indigenous community regarding their ancestral domain. They were standing in part of the contested area in Baranggay Kiantig in Quezon, Bukidnon when unknown gunmen shot at them, injuring four members of the community and one of de Guzman's campaign team.



NOT THE FIRST TIME

An investigation was launched by local officials and resolutions were filed in both houses of Congress regarding the incident but the truth is it was just the most recent altercation in a years-long fight by the Manobo-Pulangiyon to claim their ancestral land as their own. This is not even the first time violence has been inflicted on the community due to the land dispute. As recently as 2017, Renato Anglao, a leader of their community and secretary-general of Tribal Indigenous Oppressed Group, was killed by three men over the course of their struggle to reclaim their ancestral home.

According to Manobo-Pulangiyon their ancestors have lived on this land, a property consisting of nearly-1000 hectares, since before the Spanish arrived. In their Statements they refer to several key landmarks that are not only easily identifiable but also significant to their culture. These include the Salagapon Falls which is their ritual area; Banban, their sacred burial place; and the Karikayanan are from where they source root foods and herbal plants and serves as their hunting and fishing grounds.

However, in 1986 this ancestral land was placed under the control of Kiantig Development Corporation (KDC) (formerly known as Cesar Fortich Incorporated) via the awarding of the Forest Land Graze Management Agreement (FLGMA) No. 122. An FLGMA is a product-sharing agreement between a qualified entity and the government to develop, manage, and utilize grazing lands. This same FLGMA has since expired in 2018. In January 2019, a representative of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) acknowledged that property was no longer in their jurisdiction and that authority over the property had passed to the Natioonal Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP).

OLD, OLD ROOTS

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CAST OUT

The Manobo-Pulangiyon filed for their Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) with the NCIP on 5 June 1998. However, to date, no CADT has been awarded to them. In fact, in 2017, the indigenous families were forced out of the contested area, driven away from their community near the banks of the Pulangi River. At this time, Pablo Lorenzo III, who was appointed as general manager of KDC was vice-mayor of Quezon, Bukidnon. In 2019, he was elected mayor and he serves in that position to this day.

WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Following the violence in April, Amnesty International Philippines became involved in the case when Task Force Detainees of the Philippines reached out for financial assistance through the Human Rights Defenders Protection project. At the time, Amnesty provided the community – who have been living in the back streets of Quezon with no assistance from the government – with sacks of rice and medical assistance to one of the wounded community members.

Aside from providing material resources to support their community's ongoing survival, Amnesty has committed to assisting the Manobo-Pulangiyon with reclaiming their ancestral lands from KDC. They have given their free prior and informed consent to partner with us in their struggle and have undergone several consultations and trainings with us, including on human rights essentials and security. A full-scale campaign and lobby work is expected to launch in late September 2022 which will hopefully also involve several leaders and members of the community travelling to Metro Manila to meet with representatives of NCIP and DENR among other government agencies. There are also plans to partner with schools and media for the Manobo-Pulangiyon to tell the story of their struggle as widely as possible.

MANOBO PULANGIYON ACTION

FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PHILIPPINES HAS BEEN WORKING WITH THE MANOBO PULANGIYON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES STRUCTURE (IPS) / INDIGENOUS CULTURAL COMMUNITY (ICC) IN LINE WITH THEIR STRUGGLE FOR ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL RIGHTS. THEY ARE SYMBOLICALLY CALLED MP1490 AFTER THE 1,490 MANOBO-PULANGIYON FAMILIES CURRENTLY DISPLACED FROM THEIR ANCESTRAL DOMAIN IN BUTONG, QUEZON, BUKIDNON SINCE BEING OCCUPIED BY A PRIVATE PINEAPPLE PLANTATION COMPANY. AS IS OFTEN THE CASE WITH DISPLACED COMMUNITIES, MEMBERS OF THE MANOBO PULANGIYON LIVE IN PRECARIOUS CONDITIONS, OFTEN CHARGED BY POWERS LARGER THAN THEMSELVES.

BUT UNFAZED BY SAFETY AND SECURITY THREATS, THE TRIBE THROUGH ITS DATUS AND BAES HAVE DILIGENTLY FOLLOWED LEGAL PROCESSES AND NAVIGATED INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS WITH THEIR OWN THOUGH MEAGER RESOURCES. ALONGSIDE THEM, WE HAVE WRITTEN LETTERS, MET IN DIALOGUE, AND SAT ACROSS TABLES WITH PROVINCIAL TO NATIONAL AGENCIES - DAR, DENR, PNP, AFP, CHR, AND NCIP - MAKING SURE THEIR PLIGHTS ARE APPROPRIATELY REGISTERED, ON TOP OF HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION SESSIONS AND CAMPAIGN CONSULTATIONS WE INVESTED WITH THE COMMUNITY.

FINALLY IN 2023, THE TRIBE RECEIVED A COPY OF CERTIFICATE OF ANCESTRAL DOMAIN TITLE NO.261 ISSUED BY THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES (NCIP), LAWFULLY CERTIFYING THEIR OWNERSHIP OVER THE ANCESTRAL LAND.

MP1490's quality of life remained unchanged if not worsened more than a year after the issuance of their CADT. Determined to ensure the fulfillment of their human dignity will no longer be delayed any further, the tribe had independently decided to mount a reinstallation action in October 2024. Prior to this, the tribe hand-in-hand with late Amnesty Section Director Butch Olano, yet again engaged with relevant provincial, regional, and national offices in preparation for the IP-led reinstallation.

It was on its D-Day, 21 October, when Amnesty's Human Rights Observers (HROs) Project was piloted. HROs are Amnesty representatives deployed to attend public actions where there is significant risk of human rights violation or abuse. Their sole purpose is to observe protesters', duty bearers', and other relevant stakeholders' actions, and to document any incidence of human rights abuse, violation, or any other irregularities. While HROs are bound by impartiality during protest, their presence as witnesses can indirectly provide protection to or offset violence from happening against the public. The HRO Project is part of our flagship project Bilang Tibak under the Protect the Protest Global Campaign.

MP1490's action was participated by around 200 tribe members including Datus, Baes, pregnant women, youth, and children who peacefully mobilized in calling government agencies to facilitate their peaceful reinstatement to the ancestral land. However, around 400-600 individuals, including supporters from the Catholic Church, were denied entry at the checkpoints—among them, essential provisions like food and water.

The action still pushed through starting with a prayer ritual in their makeshift community center followed by another ritual by the gates of the plantation company located within ancestral zone. In the middle of the action, the tribe, especially the leaders, expressed that their members are hungry and thirsty and negotiated for the inflow of water at the checkpoints but to no avail. Because of this, community members were forced to drink unsafe water. It was only after the action, through Amnesty's negotiation that they finally allowed access to these essentials. Representatives from the media and Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and NCIP Regional Offices were present at the action site while Philippine National Police (PNP) held steady at the checkpoints. Other relevant and expected agencies failed to even make an appearance.

Post-action, the tribe had reported checkpoint irregularities with the NCIP such as the forcible confiscation of tribal weapon in violation of their customary rights, and food and water blockade by the PNP.

No concrete plans were developed nor committed by the government agencies, once again leaving the tribe along the margins of social justice. Amnesty sustains an ongoing campaign for the peaceful return of MP1490 to their ancestral lands.







