



# Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) Communication Universal Periodic Review: Philippines

## *Cordillera People*

Cordillera people constitute about 2% of the population of the Philippines and are concentrated on the island of Luzon. They are considered as the indigenous people of the island. As such, they hold a symbiotic view on land and its ownership, maintaining a strong relation to the natural environment as a source of subsistence and of their cultural identity. Despite improvements of the Philippines government in the recognition of the indigenous population as the base of the country and integrating and protecting them in the process of country's unity, the Cordillera people still find themselves vulnerable against the big development projects that the country is launching.

## **Natural Resources**

The Cordillera region is known as one of the richest in terms of natural resources. In this respect, the development projects, such as the San Roque Dam Project on the Agro River in Luzon are directly affecting them. The San Roque Dam Project (started in 1997) has for instance constrained the people of the area to be relocated. Despite agreements for relocation and compensation established ahead of the preparatory work, those contracts with the indigenous population and re-settlement compensation were not translated in the language of the communities so that they often did not understand the consequences of the contracts. The resettled population showed discontent for the very small compensation acquired. The subsequent 1997 Indigenous Peoples Rights Act dealt with this matter by providing that members of the indigenous population shall decide by consensus on the use of their ancestral lands and by providing that this use was *“to be determined in accordance to their customary laws and practices, free from external manipulation, [...], in a language and process understandable to the community”*. Despite this acknowledgement of the importance of consulting the indigenous communities on the use of their land, nothing was done to provide appropriate compensation to the indigenous populations resettled as a result of the San Roque Dam Project (still in progress).

Furthermore, the Philippines recently signed the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples whose Article 8 urges its signatories *“to provide effective mechanisms for prevention, and redress for [...] any action which has the aim or effect of dispossessing them of their lands, territories and resources.”* Similarly, in the Philippines Constitution, it is stated that the state *“shall protect and advance the right of the people to a balanced and healthful ecology in accord with the rhythm and harmony of nature”*. Not only do the development projects create the displacement of indigenous tribes but there are high risks of erosion and siltation which could create impounded water unsuitable for agriculture, the means of subsistence of the Cordillera people.

Despite, Philippines has ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which states in Article 1 that *“[...]all people have the right to freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”* In this matter, the Philippines should be implementing the different legislative laws such as in the Constitution and in the recently signed Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People which underlines the importance in protecting the environment and giving the indigenous people a voice regarding the natural environment future in which they live and relay on. As such, the development projects aiming at transforming the country from a developing country to an industrialised country are benefitting a part of the population but disregarding another, the most vulnerable one.

To this respect, we reiterate the need to take in account the full consultation of the indigenous population in their native language, to ensure the participation and the compensation of the indigenous people in times of development projects which might lead to delocalisation of a part of the indigenous population.