

## The Igorots, the Indigenous Peoples of the Northern Philippines Under the Faces of State Terrorism and Tyranny

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*"In these trying times, we must rise against the storm as a people. We must not allow our children and the people to be fed with injustice or clothed with fear..." - **Windel Bolinget**, an Igorot leader from the Cordilleras of the Philippines*

The indigenous people (IP) called the Igorots (from the Spanish term "Ygollotes" or the people of the mountains) of the Cordillera Region of the North Luzon in the Northern Philippines historically defended their ancestral lands from foreign invaders as they see land as life where their culture and identity are molded. For the Igorots' point of view, they are connected to the land like a still unborn child connected the mother with an umbilical cord.

When their land is threatened that will mean their livelihood, resources and most of all their identity perish, they must as their forefathers have done, stand up and fight against the enemy at all cost and secure the land for the future generations. This responsibility is passed on through decades and heroes and martyrs of the Igorot people were made that served as inspirations to carry on the torch of defending the land.

Meanwhile, the state forces manned by the bureaucrats together with private armies and goons attack the villages in the name of corporate mining and renewable energies owned by multinational companies. Yet, the Igorots are always on their foot to perform their task that is to ensure that the children of their grandchildren will still benefit from the lands their forefathers entrusted them.

This article shows in any particular way how the Igorots stood against aggressors and abusive rulers who favor the elite over their own people.

### **The Igorots of the Cordilleras and the national oppression against them**

The Igorots of the Cordilleras are among the indigenous peoples of the Philippines who are suffering from a national oppression deeply rooted in the Filipino society. They, (the IPs) who refused that their lands and their cultural identity be taken away from them by foreign invaders and colonizers were demonized and tagged as barbaric and savages so that their fellow countrymen who were already subjugated by the foreign invaders will look at them as enemies of civilization and therefore should be treated as different and inferiors.

When the Spanish colonizers in the early 1700s to 1800s failed in their expeditions to dig

the golds of the natives which they call *Ygollotes* (people of the mountains) as they were met with fierce resistances from them, they saw the effectiveness of the “divide and rule” tactics. They inculcated to the minds of the Filipinos in the lowlands that the *Ygollotes* are pagans and are enemies of the God of the Christians. The “Christianized” Filipinos regard the people of the mountains then their enemies as well as enemies of the state and were subjected to nationalized and institutionalized oppression and they became the national minorities.

This treatment of the Igorots as inferiors continues at present times as national oppression. The national oppression against the Igorots is manifested by: oppressive land laws and non-recognition of their rights to ancestral lands and domains; discrimination; non-recognition of indigenous socio-political systems, commercialization and vulgarization of their culture and militarization and ethnocide.

Because of the sufferings they are enduring from the national oppression against them, they realized that to be free from such, they should push their right for self-determination expressed through a Genuine Regional Autonomy.

This is being pushed by the widest IP organization of Igorots in the Cordillera, the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA). This organization was founded in 1984 with the battle-cry “for the defense of the ancestral domain and for self-determination. It is in the point of view of CPA that the IPs of the Cordillera have long been suffering from the national oppression therefore to counter it is to have autonomy where the IPs will have control over the utilization of their land and resources based from their traditions and indigenous beliefs for the benefit of all.

But attaining autonomy inside the present Philippine society which is being ruled by the few elite who controls the economy and politics of the country is impossible. From the point of view of progressive political activists, the Filipinos have been suffering from Imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism for so long, and the national oppression against the IPs was caused by these three basic problems of the Philippine society as they said.

Filipino political activists see that to end the claws of imperialism specifically US imperialism maneuvering the socio-political system of the country, feudalism where landlords exploit the landless peasants and big capitalists enslave the impoverished workers and bureaucrat capitalism where government officials and the government itself persecute their own people in the name of power and profit, a national democratic society should be established employing a real social change.

It is in this endeavor that organizations under the national democratic movement rose.

### **The tyrant that the Igorots of the Cordilleras fought**

During the reign of former dictator **Ferdinand Marcos**, political activism gained its ground while the revolutionary Communist Party of the Philippines-New People’s Army-National Democratic Front of the Philippines (CPP-NPA-NDFP) earned its bases among the masses because of the abusive and tyrannical policies of the Marcos dictatorship.



Ferdinand Marcos

Meanwhile, in the Cordillera villages, government soldiers were deployed to quell the growing opposition of the tribes to what they described as destructive energy projects being insisted by the government. The development aggression that would detach the Igorots from their lands was imposed by the Marcos dictatorship as the ruling elite view the ancestral lands and domain of the IPs as simply resource base for their so-called “development” and the Igorots as simply sacrificial lambs for the good of the majority of the Filipino people.

The Marcos government planned to build the Chico Hydroelectric dams where the rice lands and communities of the tribes of Bontoks, Sadanga of Mountain Province as well as tribes of Kalinga will be submerged; in Abra, the Tingguian tribes were also in danger of being displaced as the Cellophil Logging Resources massively cut the trees in their ancestral territories. And the Igorots met these with oppositions through organized mobilizations, petitions among others.

The government in response flooded the Igorot communities with soldiers to pacify the growing resistance of the Igorots. Their communities were militarized and abuses were committed as soldiers led by their commanders disrespected the indigenous socio-political systems of the Igorots, villages were subjected to hamletting as the soldiers brand them as communist-infected areas in desperate attempt to flush out the growing insurgency that was deemed as the greatest threat to the Marcos rule.

With their indigenous way of defending their lands and identity, the Igorot tribes wage even armed warfare against the aggressors. For many of the tribes of the Igorots engaged in tribal wars with other Igorot tribes in defending their territories from invasions in time immemorial, it was not hard for them to go to war to the people who want to snatch their lands from them, that time where the government through government soldiers together with the goons of the companies of development aggression are always on the go to silence them, the Igorot tribes organized to wage a new concept of tribal war against the aggressors insisting their interests over the Igorot ancestral lands.

The readiness of the Igorots of the Cordilleras to defend their heritage from domination

persisted even after the ouster of Marcos by the Filipinos through a people power. They triumphantly stood up against militarization employed by the successive administrations that were hell bound to favor the vested interests of the mining and energy companies.

Numerous military operation plans were launched by the government in the guise of combatting the CPP-NPA-NDFP. These operations were mostly launched within ancestral territories of the IPs of the country like in Igorot communities and villages. Human rights violations and abuses were reported and the soldiers were alleged as the perpetrators. But many of the Igorots with still many of the elders and leaders hold the line as they bear in their minds and hearts that the land is a gift to them but not for them to own but to ensure that the next generations will benefit from it.

This present administration under **President Rodrigo Duterte**, political activists see that it is being run by a rising tyrant in the person of Duterte. They saw his war on drugs go ruthless as thousands of Filipinos were subjected to extra-judicial killings where most of the victims are poor Filipinos while the big fish in the illegal drug industry seems to be untouched at all. The IP organizations like the CPA call Duterte as anti-IP as it did not lift a finger to stop the plunder of their ancestral lands, but instead deployed more soldiers and launched more combat operations in the Igorot communities as well as in other IP communities like the Lumads and the national minorities Moro people of Mindanao.

But the Igorots resolve to defend the land will be strong as always. Their elders and leaders are calling to their people to rise up against the aggressors and the rising tyrant.

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