

peacemail

VOLUME 5 • ISSUE 1

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The Lumads, the second largest group of Indigenous people in the Southern Philippines, face injustice daily. Act for Peace project partner, The National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), is working to retain the hope and dignity of the Indigenous people and their livelihood.

Many Indigenous communities throughout the area have been displaced, degraded and harassed by the government through unjust programs and policies. There have been more than 350,000 recorded human rights abuses in the Philippines since 2001, and the Lumads are experiencing incomprehensible suffering. Many Lumad communities are wrongly accused as supporters of insurgents. The accusations are used to justify military presence and operations, which make sure that logging and large-scale mining operate easily in the communities, causing environmental destruction, community displacement and family disintegration.

The Indigenous people try to maintain ancestral land rights, traditions, customs, cultures and rituals. The NCCP is one of the initiators of *KALUMARAN* – “*Strength of Indigenous Peoples in Mindanao.*” The program develops the abilities of local people, through literacy, human rights understanding and leadership and hosts advocacy and lobbying seminars. Improved literacy is particularly important for local people, as many are victims of traders under-valuing their produce, leaving them severely short-changed. A three-day course to educate one Lumad about these issues costs \$100.

Act for Peace is the international aid agency of the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA).

“The Christmas Bowl People!”



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By popular demand, **PARTNERS** is the word!

THANK YOU Act for Peace Partners for your generous gifts and your feedback. Your commitment to Act for Peace means that you really are Partners in this work and that's how we are delighted to address you. Together with our project partners, you are making a real and lasting difference to many lives. Thank you so much.

From this month 85% of all your gifts will be sent to projects.

If you would like to upgrade your regular gift, simply free call Howard or Jordan on **1800 025 101** or email **hgraham@ncca.org.au**. All gifts of \$2 or more are tax-deductible. Also, all feedback and suggestions are welcome, as we love to hear from you and to pass on comments to project partners.

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Skilling Indigenous Human Rights Leaders

Dear Partner, My name is Lorna Mora and I'm the General Secretary of the Federation of Indigenous People in Far South Mindanao (KALUHHAMIN). Along with other Indigenous groups of Lumads, we work for genuine development in our provinces.

In 2004, I began working in research with Wellspring of Science and Technology (SIBAT). SIBAT is a non-government organisation engaged in village level sustainable development with the Centre for Lumad Advocacy in the Philippines. I became the General Secretary of KALUHHAMIN in 2008.

Now, I speak on behalf of local communities and encourage people, especially local leaders, to participate in human rights training. I visit them often to ensure their participation. The training covers economic, social, cultural and political rights under the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law.

I also encourage leaders to join the speakers' training because most of our people are extremely shy. It takes about two to three courses before they openly participate in discussions during community meetings.

Often, training cannot continue in the communities because military personnel are suspicious of any community gathering. In these situations, we ask the people to go to General Santos City, about three to four hours by bus from where they live to attend courses and workshops.

I clearly remember what Eliezer "Boy" Billanes, a former leader who was killed in March, constantly told me: "We have to continually struggle towards attaining justice and peace, we cannot pluck this from bamboos, we have to fight for it." I am sad that Boy was killed, but this does not mean that the fight for rights died with him. It will continue because we know our rights.

The Arroyo government, in partnership with foreign corporations, is planning to establish a bio-fuel plantation at Jathropa, covering 30,000 hectares of agricultural lands in Sarangani Province and General Santos City. This will definitely drive us again from our lands, destroy our livelihood and affect our culture and tradition as Indigenous people. Other projects such as copper and gold mining have been halted because of the opposition of Indigenous people, peasants, environmentalists and churches in the region.



Thank you for your vital support. It means so much! \$100 can send one Lumad to a three-day training course in General Santos City. This includes transportation, food and accommodation costs and gives the ability for Indigenous people to join the struggle with self-confidence and dignity.



A leader confidently addresses a rally.

Lorna

Partner's Prayer Point: Pray for peace and justice for the Indigenous people of the Philippines.

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