



RESOLUTION ON THE PROMOTION OF LANGUAGE JUSTICE AND THE PROTECTION OF THE CULTURAL INTEGRITY AND OTHER RIGHTS OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE PHILIPPINES

The Assembly of Delegates of PEN International, meeting at its 85th Annual Congress in Manila, the Philippines, 1 to 5 October 2019

Of the 187 total number of Philippine languages, 175 are indigenous. Of the 175, four have become extinct while 14 are threatened.¹ Most of the languages under threat are spoken predominantly by indigenous people whose home and natural environment are being threatened by government development projects.²

Government plans to develop a sustainable city, “New Clark City,” on the 9,450-hectare (23,400 acres) former US military base in Tarlac province, Central Luzon are set to displace more than 20,000 indigenous Ayta people.³ The development threatens not only their livelihood and way of life—due to the reported difficulty in securing certificates of ancestral domain titles to prove their ownership of the land—but also their cultural, and with it, their linguistic, heritage.

Meanwhile in the south of the Philippine archipelago, the Lumad, as the cultural communities that are indigenous to Mindanao are called, continue to be caught in the tension and even crossfire between military forces and communist rebels.⁴ More recently, on 12 July 2019, the Department of Education ordered the shutting down of 30 of 55 Lumad schools after a report by the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict accused the schools’ operators of deviating from the basic curriculum and spreading communist propaganda.⁶ In 2020, the construction of the Mindanao Railway is slated to begin. This will affect the environmental and land issues that have concerned and been raised by indigenous communities in the past decades and that remain unaddressed by different administrations of government even before the railway project was conceived.

The Assembly of Delegates of PEN International affirms that indigenous languages, a rich repository of racial memories, should form part of the telling of the story of the different communities that use them that is also the story of humanity itself. We therefore call on the Government of the Republic of the Philippines to:

- Respect and protect the rights of the Ayta, Lumad, and all cultural communities, taking care that public and private development efforts, however well-meaning, do not deprive

marginalized communities of their rights to their ancestral domain, their rights to social justice and cultural integrity;

- Continue to promote and develop programmes conserving indigenous languages, such as the Bahay Wika (Indigenous Language School) of the Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino and the Schools of Living Traditions of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts;
- Empower the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples to be true to its mandate by giving additional funds for programs specifically in the area of language and culture preservation;
- Confirm the fact that literatures written in indigenous languages are *de facto* important constituents of a national literature in the continuing formation of culture and identity; and
- Ratify International Labour Organisation Convention No. 169.

¹ Figures by *Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino* Commissioner Purificacion de Lima http://kwf.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Bahay-Wika-for-Ayta-Magbukun-The-Case-of-the-Philippines_Purificacion-Delima.pdf

² Vincent S. Balila, Julia Anwar McHenry, Mark P. McHenry, Riva Marris Parkinson, 2013. The Indigenous Aetas of Bataan, Philippines: Extraordinary Genetic Origins, Modern History, and Land Rights. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 34 (3), 292-306.

³ <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1138945/p607-b-clark-green-city-to-displace-aeta-communities>

⁴ Many of these Lumad communities hold ancestral domain rights to mineral and resource-rich territories that have become vulnerable to capitalist speculation and development.

⁵ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/25/philippine-presidents-appalling-threat-bomb-tribal-schools>

⁶ <https://www.rappler.com/nation/235305-deped-orders-closure-lumad-schools-davao-region>

⁷ <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1141658/what-went-before-lumad-schools>

⁸ Quoted in Why Language Matters by Bob Holman <http://www.languagemattersfilm.com/educational-resources/why-language-matters/>

Annex

The threats facing the Ayta of Luzon and the Lumad of Mindanao are directly linked to the political economy. As linguist Leanne Hinton asserts:

The decline of linguistic diversity in the world is linked to the world political economy which invades and takes over the territories of indigenous peoples, threatens the ecosystems in which they live, wipes out their traditional means of livelihood, and (at best) turns them into low-caste laborers in the larger society in which they must now live on the margins.⁸

The PEN Charter affirms that “Literature knows no frontiers and must remain common currency among people in spite of political or international upheavals,” and literature here may be broadly interpreted as contiguous to culture since literature is a linguistic manifestation and aesthetic expression of culture.

Furthermore, the PEN Charter urges that, “Members of PEN should at all times use what influence they have in favor of good understanding and mutual respect between nations and people; they pledge themselves to do their utmost to dispel all hatreds and to champion the ideal of one humanity living in peace and equality in one world.”

Furthermore, the 2011 Girona Manifesto of the PEN International’s Translation and Linguistic Rights Committee declares, “Respect for all languages and cultures is fundamental to the process of constructing and maintaining dialogue and peace in the world.”

Essential to preserving the cultural integrity of minorities is language justice. In the Chiapas meeting in 2019 of the PEN International Translation and Linguistic Rights Committee, language justice was cited as one critical area of advocacy that the PEN must work on. It means giving the indigenous languages, marginalized as they are by the forces of the global political economy, their due; it is giving them their right to integrity and wholeness; it is giving them their right to survive and thrive. In the words of the late Philippine President Ramon Magsaysay (a native of Zambales province in Central Luzon that also hosts Ayta communities), providing justice means giving “those who have less in life ... more in law,” for their protection, preservation, survival, and development.