

PRESS RELEASE – April 5, 2012

THE MANILA DECLARATION

**on Indigenous Peoples' and Community Conserved Areas and Territories (ICCAs)
approved and delivered to the Deputy Speaker of Parliament Rep. Lorenzo R. Tañada III
at the first National Conference on ICCAs in the Philippines
The University of the Philippines, Quezon City, Manila 29-30 March 2012**



“This declaration is an important step forward for the recognition, promotion, and protection of the rights and freedoms of Indigenous Peoples to govern their traditional territories and community conserved areas.” (Manila Declaration, Page 2)

ICCAs is the short term used in last decade to encompass the territories and areas conserved in a voluntary way by Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and local communities (LCs) through their customary laws and other effective means. The first to be organised in the Philippines, a National Conference on ICCAs entitled “*Nature in the Footsteps of our Ancestors*” took place in Manila on 29-30 March 2012 and culminated with the launch of the Manila Declaration.

The Conference brought together IP leaders from ancestral domains representing the country’s key biodiversity areas, government representatives, local and international NGOs, UN agencies, and cooperation agencies from numerous countries. In a Skype message delivered at the beginning of the Conference by Dr. John Scott, Dr. Braulio Ferreira de Souza Dias, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), affirmed that: “*The Philippines is a recognized leader on Indigenous rights and recognition of ICCAs. There is much other countries can learn from it.*” Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, recent Chairperson of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and current Executive Director of TEBTEBBA, stressed that “*ICCAs are an affirmation of IP territories.*” And Giovanni Reyes, Secretary General of the Koalisyon Ng Katutubo at Samahan Ng Pilipinas (KASAPI Inc)— the Philippines’ largest and much respected IP Coalition that played a key organising role for the Conference, highlighted “*...the critical role that IPs and their customary laws and traditional activities have played in conserving a variety of natural environments in the country.*”

Indeed much learning consolidated during the Conference, which marked the culmination of *three sub-national workshops* held in November 2011 and attended by *over 100 indigenous leaders* representing the ethnographic regions of Luzon, the Island groups, and Eastern and Western Mindanao. The workshops examined the status of ICCAs in the Philippines, the importance of IP engagement in ICCA processes and the threats they face. The collective insights gathered from the sub-national workshops are reflected in the Manila Declaration, which boldly asserts demands and recommendations on how to provide recognition and support to ICCAs and their governing bodies. Among those, the Declaration asks the government to: “*...support the indigenous peoples’ capability to manage their ICCAs... [and] do not invent new systems or processes from somewhere else that will undermine them.*” The Declaration also addresses NGOs, which are requested to “*simplify things*” and “*respect spiritual relationships of the Indigenous peoples.*” Accompanied by the mesmeric drone of the *kalaleng*, a bamboo-made nose flute played by two Indigenous Elders from the Cordillera region of Northern Philippines, each Indigenous delegate at the conference signed the Manila Declaration in the afternoon of 30 March.

A key decision embodied in the Declaration is the creation of a *National ICCA Network in the Philippines*, which will facilitate the recognition and support of ICCAs. KASAPI was unanimously mandated by the IP participants to be the lead organization for such network, and to establish an *ad-hoc* body to coordinate and implement a consolidated action plan pending the official establishment of the *ICCA National Council*. Other plans include the establishment of a *National ICCA Registry* and a national *School of Living Traditions*, which will integrate traditional knowledge and biodiversity conservation and prepare an *ICCA Capacity Building Development Plan*.

Spearheaded by a project dedicated to the New Conservation Areas in the Philippines (NewCAPP) with support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Conference was designed to promote diversified forms of governance in the country’s Key Biodiversity Areas, create a better understanding of ICCAs, and generate support for their recognition and respect in the country. Ms. Floradema Eleazar, Project Manager of NewCAPP stressed that these objectives are “*...in line, among others, with the recommendations of the Programme of Work on Protected Areas of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. They also well fit the conservation objectives of the Philippines and its progressive legislation on the collective rights of IPs (IPRA Law, 1997)*”. In the words of Renaud Meyer, UNDP Country Director: “*ICCA not only contribute to arresting biodiversity loss but to the overall ensuring of environmental sustainability and fulfilment of Millennium Development Goal 7 and 1 [environmental sustainability and eradication of extreme poverty and hunger].*”

NewCAPP entrusted the role of key conference organiser to KASAPI, which convened it jointly with the University of the Philippines and PAFID (Philippine Association for Intercultural Development, Member of the ICCA Consortium). “*If we are to assure a future for our children, it is high time that due respect and recognition are accorded to Indigenous Peoples and their ICCAs*” said Dave de Vera, Executive Director of PAFID and co-facilitator of the Conference with Ms. Maria Teresa Guia Padilla of Anthropology Watch. The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), a member of the NewCAPP Project Board, also took part in the Conference. In the words of Hon. Zenaida Brigida H. Pawid, Chairperson of NCIP: “*The National Commission on Indigenous People is 110% behind the ICCA concept in the Philippines.*”

The government of the Philippines also strongly expressed its appreciation of ICCAs. Hon. Ramon J.P. Paje, Secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources affirmed that “*The Department is willing and ready to carry out an ICCA [support] program. We will place the resources – both staff and programs of DENR– behind ICCAs.*” The voice of the Parliament was brought-in by Senator Aquilino “Koko” Pimentel III: “*We should aid IPs in their desire to preserve their ancestral lands. Legislators should work for the better appreciation and institution of policies that protect the rights and lands of IPs.*” And, as noted by Ms. Loretta Ann P. Rosales, Chairperson of the Philippines Commission on Human Rights, even “*...the Committee on Human rights is ready to defend IPs and uphold their rights in their ICCAs.*”

The Conference was hosted by the National College of Public Administration and Governance of the University of The Philippines (UP). As clearly expressed by the UP President Alfredo Pascual: “***The University of The Philippines is willing to provide the expertise and assistance needed to support ICCAs so that our Indigenous Peoples can be empowered to continue their work.***” Dr. Edna Estifania, Dean of the National College of Public Administration and Governance, and the UP Vice-President Dr. Prospero de Vera III also noted ICCAs as a form of governance for both protected areas and natural resources conserved outside protected areas.

From the international community, the Conference saw the participation and co-sponsorship of the ICCA Consortium, the Commission on Environmental, Economic, and Social Policy (CEESP) of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the global ICCA Registry of the World Conservation Monitoring Centre of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP-WCMC). Ms. Colleen Corrigan, Senior Programme Officer at UNEP WCMC, explained the procedure of submitting new sites to the global ICCA Registry and welcomed already at the Conference the submissions of six new ICCA entries from the Philippines. As noted by Dr. Grazia Borrini Feyerabend, Global Coordinator of the ICCA Consortium and Vice-Chair of CEESP: “***The international community is looking up to the Philippines to learn how Indigenous peoples and local communities can be effectively empowered to protect, sustainably manage and restore their ICCAs; this is crucially important today, as ICCAs play— among others— an irreplaceable role in disaster prevention and resilience in the face of climate and other global changes.***”

For the full text of the Manila Declaration, both in Tagalog and English please [click here](#). See also: www.newcapp.org , www.kasapi.org , www.pafid.org and www.iccaconsortium.org

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