

VF  
Davao-Ethnicide

COVER STORY



Five hundred seventy Lumads came to the city. Two hundred fifty more are coming. They walked for three days and three nights to bring us a message: *Respect us as human beings. Respect our yutang kabilin.*

This is the story of these people's exodus. **ATENELO DE DAVAO LIBRARY**

✓ **YUTANG KABILIN**

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Davao - Ethnocide

In the municipality of Talaingod in the Northern part of Davao, trees are being cut and the natives of the place are being driven out of their lands. New trees will be planted. These plants won't symbolize life. Each of them will be a note reminding them that the poor are powerless, and that land, which they regard as nothing less than their life, could be bought.

The trees will symbolize the progress of logging business of the Alcantara and Sons (Alsons), a real estate firm which has "profit" as its middle name. They will be a testimony to DENR's Industrial Forest Management which claims to be a "reforestation project" but is, in the real sense a "logging export project".

They will be but symbols of Philippines 2000 which promises that six years from now the 2000 most wealthy and powerful families shall own most, if not all, of the Philippines. They will be silent witnesses to the plunder of the military who fed themselves on the fruits of the labor of the weak. They will be badges on the chests of Lumads who traded the honor and dignity of their people for objects of earthly gratification.

The Alsons engages in wood processing. The presidential assistant for Mindanao, Paul Dominguez, used to be its manager; it is owned by his in-laws. Alsons will cover more than half of the municipality's area (46,000 hectares) upon the implementation of its 29,000-hectare expansion plan.



The land conflict in this area is a typical case of a government-approved project overlapping with an ancestral domain. This scenario is true to all the government-approved projects throughout the country which run in conflict with the right to ancestral domain of the indigenous people. Many Lumad areas have been taken by logging companies, mining concessions, ranches, agribusiness plantations and power generating projects.

The IFMA was formulated by the government to ensure adequate supply of forest products. They gave to loggers and other interested parties the task of implementing the government's Industrial Forest Plantation (IFP) program.

The program appears noble in its cause to uplift our economy and protect our natural resources. In actuality, it takes a toll on the indigenous peoples. If they don't have a piece of paper to show they own the vast tract of land, the government can claim jurisdiction over it.

If a piece of paper could be that

powerful, why do they ignore the provision in the Constitution about ancestral domains (Article XII, Section 5)?

According to the project, each Atamanobo family will be allowed to cultivate two hectares—one hectare for their crops and the other for planting commercial trees for Alsons.

The Lumads are used to communal farming. This arrangement would keep them from practicing their laws and customs.

Then the lumads talked of militarization.

The 64th Infantry Battalion unit of the Philippine Army, under the 602nd Army Brigade, inhabited Talaingod in the guise of maintaining peace and order. According to Datu Okang Apoga of Sitio Nasilaban, military men raided his house looking for the presence of rebels. He and his family was asked to get out of the house at gun-point. Not finding any NPAs, the soldiers left taking the datu's chicken without asking his approval.

Just this February 13 Lumad fami-

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lies fled upon seeing a group of soldiers approaching their place, fearing the trauma of military operations. After a few days later, they found 5 houses destroyed and 43 chickens butchered.

Adus Ibudan, an Ata-Manobo woman, claimed that she was once stopped at a military checkpoint. The soldiers took from her a sack of rice, a sack of corn, a chicken and 5 eggs before she was allowed to pass.

Did they really come for peace and order? It seems that all they did manage to achieve was to disrupt it.

Worse, the Ata-Manobos have been betrayed by their own tribesmen. The mayor of Talaingod, Jose Libayao, a datu himself, has brushed aside the demands of his fellow Ata-Manobos. His loyalty obviously lies with Alsons, for whom he has worked as a concession guard for more than ten years. But the fight is definitely not solely between lumads. Libayao has clearly become a willing weapon wielded by Alsons to enforce "development".

During the first week of August, more than 500 Ata-Manobo evacuated

their homes and headed for the cities in the hope that the lowlanders, who they had thought knew more about the law and the justice that it promises, would understand their plight.

But what greeted them was unexpected.

After only a few days in Davao City, the professional media released state-

When this reached the tribe leaders, their disappointment gave way to indignation.

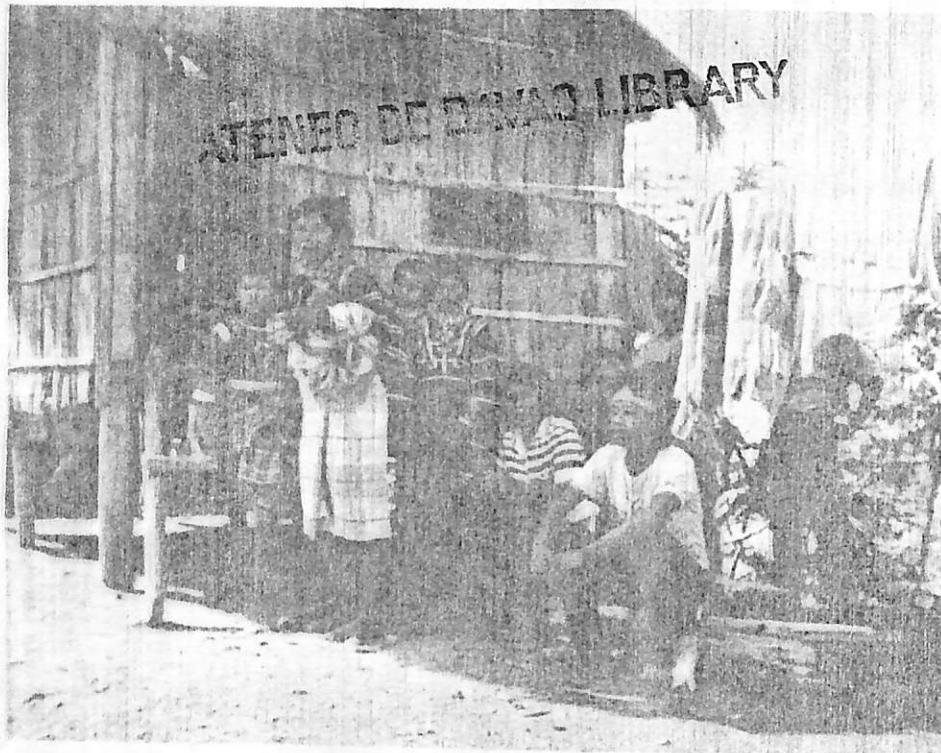
"Dili importante ang bugas ug pagkaon. Ang kinahanglan namo ang inyong pagpakabana," Datu Lesoro Losendo of the Salugpungan Ta Tana Nigkannuhon flatly stated.

The land contains a variety of living things, including man. Study how a society uses its land, and you can tell as to what its future will be.

We adopted the laws of the Americans. Hence they were not really rooted in our own culture. America's law about reservations for Indians is reflected on our provision about ancestral domain.

Even Uncle Sam's negligence for the true pioneers of his land is reflected on our government's lack of concern for indigenous people.

Our products are not for our own people but for export. Japan is looking for a country who will permanently supply them with pulp. The Philippines eagerly implemented IFMA to cater to



ments that the Talaingod controversy was non-existent, that the lumads were merely being used in a propaganda war waged and headed by the Solidarity Action Group for Indigenous Peoples (SAGIP), the NGO which volunteered to house and look after the evacuees. Efforts to secure relief assistance were labelled as activities geared towards collecting funds for SAGIP's exclusive use.

Japan's needs. Still, we are fools enough to think it are us who is gaining something.

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Still, we are fools enough to turn the other way and put on a mask of indifference in the face of this concrete situation that warrants not our pity but our discernment and involvement.

Last September 5, the Ata-Manobos camped at the evacuation center held a solidarity night. It was a preparation of the datu for the incoming government survey of their lands. NGOs, volunteers and some students came to join the Ata-Manobos in their prayer to Magbabaya to help them in their cause.

After the ritual was over, the lumads danced to give thanks. It was more than a dance, for each step they made was a communion with the land.

Then a young girl sang soulfully. I thought she was singing about a lost love. At the middle of the song, a datu interpreted her song for us. It was not love she lost.

It was a land.

It was a home.

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**"We remain ignorant because some people find it profitable to keep us ignorant. . . . free us from bondage and we shall prove you false."**