

Oral Statement of the 32nd Session of the UN Human Rights Council
Agenda Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with the UN SR on International Displaced Persons, 20 June 2016
Delivered by Ms Nora Polie-Sukal

**Impact of Mining Project on Internal Displacement of Indigenous Peoples
in the Philippines**

Mr. President,

I am Nora Polie-Sukal. I am the representative of the Bla'ani Tribe in Tampakan, South Cotabato, Philippines. I will re-echo to you the voice of the Bla'an Bong Banwe Territory of Tampakan. We thank Dr. Beyani Chaloka for visiting us on July 25-26, 2015. My community is deeply appreciative of the veracity of your report and we come now to the UN Human Rights Council to convey our grievances and urge the Philippine government to heed our appeals.

The proposed copper and gold open-pit mining project within our Ancestral Domains poses serious risks to our survival as a tribe. It is said to be the largest open-pit in Southeast Asia if realized covering around 4,000-hectares of old-grown forest and five ancestral domains.

As highlighted in the report of Dr. Chaloka and based on the 2013 published Human Rights Impact Assessment there will be high risks of cultural loss and violations of indigenous rights. 5,000 Bla'aans will be resettled away from the forest which have been our refuge when we have nothing to eat or medicine when we are sick. The forest is our spiritual ground where we can commune with and praise our God.

Despite the existence of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Acts (IPRA Law) of the Philippines mandating for the protection and promotion of the rights of the indigenous cultural communities and the indigenous peoples, we feel that we are still deprived of some of our cultural rights. The appointment of individuals who are not legitimate to represent our community caused conflicts and divides us. The disparity among us tribes resulted in disunity which slowly destroys our culture of oneness.

Therefore, the Bla'an Bong Bangwe Territory appeals to the Human Rights Council to draw the attention of the Philippine government, particularly the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples to consider implementing the recommendation of Prof. Beyani Chaloka and that the Philippine Government must ensure:

- 1. Truthful implementation of the IPRA Law that coheres with our customary laws;**
- 2. Hasten legal remedies and delivery of justice to those who were killed incidental to this development aggression;**

- 3. Inclusive consultation as regards this proposed project and ensure that all voices are heard including us, the Bla'an tribe who will be displaced with the implementation of this mining operation;**
- 4. Prevention of arbitrary internal displacement.**

Further, we urge that at every stage of development projects, the international standards on the rights of indigenous peoples and UN guiding principles on Internal Displacement must be fully adhered to.

ⁱ The Bla'an Tribe belongs to the Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines. They are also known as the Lumads. The struggle of the Bla'an tribes in Tampakan, South Cotabato caused by the mining company started way back in the 1990's and since then the promised economic development through this mining remains a mirage as poverty is still greatly felt by every Bla'an of the Bong Banwe Territory except for those supporters of the mining company.