

Novel ways of IP representation in local *sanggunian* up in Mountain Province



How does one ensure representation of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) in local communities whose elected officials are all IPs?

That's the paradox facing the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) in complying with the representation of IPs in the *Sangguniang Bayan* (SB) and *Panlalawigan* (SP) as mandated by the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) or Republic Act 8371.

Local governments in CAR have long refused additional IP representation in local councils for various reasons. Foremost is that SB and SP members are themselves all IPs, so why need additional representation? There is also the issue of administrative cost of having additional salaries and program funds, which would exert pressure on the budgets of LGUs, especially among those in the 4th to 5th income classes.

It also does not help that local officials spend time and resources to get elected, whereas IP representatives do not. And finally, there are a number of civil society organizations, also composed of IPs, that already involve themselves in the affairs of local governance.



But until Congress addresses the legal paradox in the case of IP representation, PD Anthony Ballug does not intend to ignore the law and arrogate unto his hands the discretion of implementation.

I recognize the strong resistance from local officials to have additional IP representation in the municipal, city and provincial councils, PD Ballug said, but the legal remedy is beyond the Department. There has to be a creative way of addressing this complex issue, he added.

The PD held formal and informal meetings with LGU officials, together with MLGOOs and representatives from the provincial office of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), and took note of the points of contestation.

Instead of addressing these points and clashing with LGU officials, the DILG team explained the benefits of compliance and the implications to the good housekeeping standing of LGUs in the province.

The IP representation is required by law and forms part of the seal of good housekeeping criteria of the Department, PD Ballug emphasized. Without this seal being conferred, the LGU will not be able to access financial incentives from the national government, including DILG's Performance Challenge Fund, loans from the Bureau of Local Government Finance, program and funds assistance from the PAMANA (*Payapa at Masaganang Pamayanan*) initiative of the Office of the President, water grants for waterless communities, and additional funds for local roads, among others.

PD Ballug then focused on the issue of salaries of IP representatives.

The Provincial Director appealed instead to IPs in the community, particularly those who are highly respected and with high ascendancy based on cultural and ethnic norms, to consider being an IP representative in local councils sans salary but with huge responsibility to elevate the causes of IP communities. I appealed to their sense of mission and commitment to the IPs in general, he stressed.

The call was heeded and the LGUs did not refuse.

Ten municipalities and the provincial government in the Mountain Province finally had IP representatives in the SB and SP by the first quarter of 2013. In addition, all 144 barangays have selected their own IP representatives.

For PD Ballug, where LGUs seem to have been stalled by issues of finances in complying with IP representation in local councils, they have chosen to rise up after the Department appealed to their sense of mission to the cause of IPs.

At the end of the day, all of us are IPs who decided foremost to focus on our cultural well-being, rather than allow ourselves to be divided by narrow interests, he ended.

