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Intervention 3.a.

Thank you Mr. Chairman for giving me a chance to express the problems in our country.

My name is Nena D. Undag a Higaonon tribe of Northern part of Mindanao, Philippines. I represented here my organization the *KAHIUSAHAN SA MGA HIGAONON INC. (KHI)* the federation of twelve (12) Peoples Organization (PO) of the province of Misamis Oriental, Cagayan de Oro City and some parts of Bukidnon, Philippines.

The Higaonon people are part of the twenty two (22) Indigenous People of Mindanao, otherwise known as Lumads. In 1982 the Higaonon population was 233,000 and in 1996, the defunct Office for Southern Cultural Communities (OSCC) estimated the number of Higaonon to be 312,840.

Higaonon reside in all province of Northern Mindanao: Bukinon, Misamis Oriental, Agusan del Norte/Sur, Lanao del Sur (along the boundaries of Misamis Oriental Province) and Camiguin Island. However, in the same survey it conspicuously dislodges Higaonon in the municipalities of Balingasag and Claveria.

Most of them dwell in the mountain areas of the region. However, there are Higaonon who live in the plains and coastal areas but almost of them are assimilated. They have adapted to the values and life ways of lowlanders.

On the other hand, majorities of the Higaonon in the hinterland still practiced their culture and tradition. However, the influence from the mainstream has embedded into the life ways and value system of the Higaonons, brought about by cash economy and globalization.

In the past, big agricultural growers already used Higaonon territories for plantation business. American Corporation like Del Monte planted pineapple to thousand of hectares in the province of Bukidnon, displacing thousand of Higaonon. This multinational company still exist through the local subsidiary the Philippines Packing Corporation.

Currently the influx of non-traditional plantation like Palm Oil are regarding Mindanao as site for their business and this made some of the local government unit in frenzy. LGU provided favourable atmosphere to attract business interest in the oil palm. LGU in Bukidnon and Misamis Oriental spearhead the Oil Palm interest. Impasug-ong town of Bukidnon is in full force to implement oil palm industry, offering their best resources, Talakag will appropriate 30,000 hectares, mostly under CBFM, Manolo Fortich 50,664 hectares while Balingasag and Claveria are planning to avail this kind of project.

Most of these areas are located in Higaonon Peoples Ancestral Domain and currently, the people are still processing their application for the Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) The usual come on scheme and their advertisement are focused on economic benefits such as increased household income and diversity source of income. However, the scheme did

not elaborate the downside of oil palm plantation previous account however revealed. Palm oil plantation did more harm than good. In the province of Agusan del Sur, thousand of Manobos people migrant settlers were displaced. Report also disclosed that quiet a number were salvaged defending their land from business interest.

The security of tenure of the Indigenous Population in the Philippines is in constant threat because its security lies in the benevolence of the government. Big business interest have more assurance from government with respect to their terminal right. Yet, very core of the Philippines Government right of owning the land is based in the feudal conquest imposed by the colonial regimes in the past and its policies, decrees (during the Marcos dictatorial regimes) and law. Take the eighteen degrees slope rule of the Forestry code, it states that all land eighteen degrees above sea level are considered as forest land, therefore considered as public domain.

Disenfranchisement of the indigenous people rights to land is the basis of their problem of poverty and security of tenure. However, a glimpse of hope came up when Indigenous People Right Act (IPRA 8371) was enacted in 1997. Some IP leader consider the act as a holistic law because of its provisions that supports the Indigenous peoples. In paper, it promotes and protects the rights of the IP to the Ancestral Domain, Self-determination, and empowerment, cultural integrity, social justice; human rights and basic services. But unfortunately because of non implementation and practice of Indigenous people Right Act IPRA, this has not been operationalized.

The present situation depicts positive effort in government action towards IPRA implementation. However, it took several years before land titles are awarded to IP communities. However, with the Higaonon Peoples, not one community was awarded with CADT to date. This is true because application for the title is costly. IP applicants have to seek help from Non Governmental Organization (NGO) for financial support in the application.

If IP communities will process via government channels, nothing will come out of it. The budget for NCIP in CADT processing is still tangled in the government bureaucratic red tape. Most IP applicant for CADT have donor agency which, help them in processing their application. On the other hand, most IP communities have to wait for a long time for their application to move. Meantime big business interest are moving in fast.

Therefore, I would like to suggest that the Working Group include recommendation in its report that;

It needs adequate budgetary outlay to enable the various line agencies particularly National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP) and other national and international agencies to fully implement their mandate in providing services to the Indigenous Peoples.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.