



Kinder, Grade 6, and Grade 10 graduates of the Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center with UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Department of Education Indigenous Peoples Education Focal Person for Region X Josephine Valledor, Bendum Tribal Council, and APC Executive Director Pedro Walpole.

## APC Graduation 2019: a celebration of community and culture

The Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center (APC) held its graduation rites on 28 March, but more than a celebration of its students' achievements, the ceremony was first and foremost a celebration of community and culture.

With the theme "Sa gaup tugdaan hu katatau daw kalandang aman ipanaw ta kabukalagan ta iyan taytayan hu kalambuan (The gaup, the source of knowledge and peace, is shared with the next generation as it is the path to human development)" the program highlighted the role of the ancestral domain and the community in instilling a sense of belonging and identity to the youth.

Guest Speaker Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, highlighted the role of Indigenous Peoples in sustaining 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity, and the need for communities to understand their rights in order to protect their ancestral domain.

And with 2019 declared as International Year of Indigenous Languages, she emphasized the importance of making a conscious effort to sustain indigenous languages and cultural practices like the *dasang* of the Pulangiyeñ, a rhythmic

storytelling performed to express the peoples' history or to resolve conflicts in the community. She affirmed what APC is doing, not simply teaching the youth to read and write, but also sustaining the Pulangiyeñ culture.

She said there is a need to have more schools similar to APC in different parts of the Philippines, as "culturally relevant and appropriate education is key in solving the environmental and cultural crisis."

"The culture is where the youth will understand where they come from, their values, and their responsibility in the community. This reminds us who we are, what is important to us, and what we can contribute to the world," she said.

She also reminded the graduates to never forget their roots wherever they go, and to always think of ways to help improve the situation in the community.

"You do not just study to understand the world; you study so you can change the world," she told the graduates.

Department of Education Indigenous Peoples Education Focal Person for Region X, Ms. Josephine Valledor, also attended the event and addressed the community. She expressed her happiness in seeing

APC sustaining the youth's sense of culture and identity and respect for their ancestral domain.

"Thank you for protecting your gaup (ancestral domain). In doing so, you sustain the life of all," she said.

These sentiments were echoed in the presentations and speeches of the students.

"What I will never forget that I learned from APC is about the gaup that we must care for, especially the forest as this is where the water comes from and where our life springs," Angelina Guilosan, Grade 6 said.

"One day, we will be fathers, mothers, and community leaders too. We will strive to do for the next generation what you have done for us today. We will use what we have learned to protect and sustain our gaup," Juanito Ampohon, Grade 10, added.

Twenty-seven students graduated from the APC K-12 program (eight from Kinder, 13 from Grade 6, and six from Grade 10), while nine completed the Hulas training in Masonry and were awarded national certifications from TESDA, and seven completed the Global English Language Program in partnership with Jesuit Worldwide Learning. ◆

## Indigenous communities and youth: Distinct local and global roles in sustaining environment and culture

APC invited Ms Victoria “Vicky” Tauli-Corpuz, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as the key speaker during the student graduation activity on 28 March. Vicky shared her work and experiences as she listened to the concerns and activities of indigenous groups in many parts of the world from the Amazon, the Congo Basin, in Latin America.

She stressed the distinct role and contribution of Indigenous Peoples in protecting and managing critical ecosystems, biodiversity, forest and water resources, hence locally and globally, indigenous communities with their knowledge and practices have much to share.

Vicky also explained the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) that established in September 2007 “a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of Indigenous Peoples of the world and elaborates on existing human rights standards and fundamental freedoms.”

The following are key points of Vicky’s address to the Pulangiyen youth:

### 1. The role of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is to write reports about issues faced by Indigenous Peoples globally. If no one reports these, they will not be given attention.

- Indigenous Peoples need to understand what is happening in mainstream society globally because this will help them think of ways to better protect their lands, values, languages, and culture. Whether we like it or not, Indigenous Peoples are affected by decisions made by corporations and governments.

- There are laws internationally (UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) and locally (such as the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act in the Philippines) that aim to protect indigenous rights, but these are still violated and not implemented well.

- Indigenous Peoples need to understand these laws so they can assert their rights and not think of themselves as weak or pitiful.

### 2. We need to share models of best practices in culture-based education, of which APC is one.

- There are 7,000 languages globally, and 5,000 of these are spoken by Indigenous Peoples. The UN proclaimed 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages because many of these languages are endangered. We need to make a conscious effort to sustain these for the generations to come.

- Eighty percent of the world’s biodiversity is in ancestral lands. Governments must help Indigenous Peoples in protecting these lands. They need to understand the role of indigenous communities in sustaining the environment and must not drive them away from their ancestral domain.

- There is a need to have more schools similar to APC in different parts of the Philippines to strengthen culture-based education. The government has a duty to respect the right of Indigenous Peoples to a culturally-relevant and appropriate education. This is key in addressing the environmental and cultural crisis.



- The *dasang* of the Pulangiyen, the *hudhud* of the Ifugao, are not merely rituals. This is where the youth will understand where they come from, their values, and their responsibility in the community. These remind us who we are, what is important to us, and what we can contribute to the world.

### 3. Importance of community

- The APC school is different from other schools in that the school is considered an integral part of the community. Its goal is not only to teach the youth to read and write, but to sustain the culture.

- Bendum is different from other communities because it remains peaceful, while other neighboring barangays evacuated or were militarized. The peace is sustained because of the unity of the community.

- For Indigenous Peoples, the community is not only the present. The past and the future are also part of the community. We learn from the past, sustain our ancestors’ tradition, knowledge, and values, and in everything we do, we think of the impact seven generations in the future, or the seven-generation ethic.

- The flora and fauna are also part of the community, as well as the visible and invisible, the living and non-living things.

### 4. The *gaup* (pronounced ga-oo) or ancestral domain for Indigenous Peoples all over the world, is not just a source of knowledge but also the source of life. It does not only sustain their livelihood but is the source of their identity (such as the, Pulangiyen from the Pulangi), wisdom, and culture.

- This is what makes Indigenous Peoples distinct from people in mainstream society who do not have a relationship with the land, water, biodiversity, thus it is so easy for them to destroy the environment and unsustainably exploit natural resources.

- A common wisdom from indigenous cultures around the world is to take care of the environment because they know they are part of it and if the environment is destroyed, they destroy themselves.

- It is important for the youth to always go back to their roots. Wherever they go after graduation, they must never forget their community, and always think of ways to help improve its situation. “You do not just study to understand the world; you study so you can change the world.” ◆



## APC indigenous youth join global climate movement to share how culture aids climate change mitigation

The classrooms at the APC school were empty on 15 March, Friday - what would have been an ordinary school day for the students. With the academic year ending, students should be studying for their final lessons, and teachers preparing the final exams, apart from the deadlines and other school requirements to be met.

But on this particular Friday, in solidarity with over 1.5 million school children, APC students took their lessons to the streets to share with community members and anyone willing to listen, what they learned about climate change and what it means for their future, and what their culture taught them in caring for Creation.

Dubbed as *Pēgsalumatēng hu Tunghaan para hu Panahon* (the Pinulangiyen translation of the global banner School Strike 4 Climate), the activity started with a 12-kilometer mountain-terrain walk from the APC campus in Sitio Bendum, Barangay Busdi, and on to the next village, Barangay Saint Peter, where the students of Saint Isidore High School met them. The students then proceeded to the next village, Barangay Zamboanguita, where they held talks on climate change, the school strikes in other parts of the world, and the climate action demanded by students and other youth globally from politicians, the business community, and other adults.

Over 150 APC students from *Daweg* (Grade) 6-11 and from the Hulas youth group (the APC program for community youth on technical skills and formation), joined by their teachers, took part in the school strike. The group stopped at every sitio and barangay to explain their activity and share simple ways that community members can do to minimize their carbon footprint.

Drawing from their cultural values and practices, the students talked about how Indigenous Peoples' forest

management and regeneration efforts help mitigate the impacts of climate change.

“We want everyone to see that even if we are young and small, we help reduce the impacts of climate change through responsible natural resource management of our forests and water,” Edrolen Comonlay, 12, one of the youngest who joined the strike, said. Natural resource management is at the core of APC education as an indigenous community school.

“As Pulangiyēn youth who live by the forest, we want to protect our *gaup* (pronounced ga-ooop and means ancestral domain). Climate change is threatening the biodiversity in our ancestral domain... We need to achieve a balance in how we live with other creations so that we can continue to live sustainably,” Gino Suldahan, 18, said.

Part of the Pulangiyēn culture is their respect for the forest and everything in their ancestral domain, in gratitude to *Migtanghaga* (the Creator).

“In our culture, we believe that the Creator protects the water, land and the forest. We are grateful for these abundant resources, so we take care of our ancestral domain. Without these, what will happen to us?” asked Jason Menaling, Forest Farm and Leadership in the Margins Team Leader.

The group handed out flyers to people along the way, explaining their reason for joining the strike, while carrying placards and banners bearing various calls such as No to fossil fuels, yes to renewable energy and Promote organic farming.



At Zamboanguita, the APC students led educational discussions with students of Saint Isidore High School on how developing countries like the Philippines bear the brunt of climate change impacts primarily caused by greenhouse gas emissions from developed countries. They tackled how farmers are trapped in a cycle of debt due to unpredictable climate that leads to crop failure and food insecurity.

The group also discussed ways to mitigate climate change such as indigenous farming methods (multi-cropping, agroforestry), breaking away from the linear economic model (take-use-throw) and shifting to a circular economy, and the need for global commitment to cut greenhouse gas emissions. >>> *continued on page 5*

## Graduation Message 2019: Creating a space for youth accompaniment, sense of identity, belonging



The following is a translation of APC Executive Director Pedro Walpole's address to the students and the community:

I want to thank you all for coming, and may your coming and going be a blessing for you and for all.

When we celebrate today the different occasions for graduating, we also celebrate the community and culture, for these are the context of the children's and youth's learning and opportunity to grow. The community is able to be a place of learning because it is a place of peace, open yet vulnerable, and always seeking healing: healing of relations and healing of the land. This is greatly helped because of the *gaup* (ancestral domain) and because of the four *dalēpaan*. Help us to keep the peace on the land so we may continue to learn and seek together more sustainable opportunities for our youth.

We work with and have many programs to celebrate: we have the Department of Education recognition for grade school and junior high school, and we hope next year to have our first senior high school graduates. And there are four connecting schools. We should also by next year have TESDA recognition for a Farm School, what we call the Forest, Farm and Leadership in the Margins. This has grown out of a program of broader learning called Hulas. We have been regenerating the land and water for the last 25 years, after the logging companies left over 35 years ago, so these and other achievements we have to celebrate with local government in sustaining marginal communities.

This morning you were welcomed, a *pandawat* in a way, and also there is much gratitude for what the teachers, the Ate and Kuya are doing. There is also gratitude for the ancestors or *kalikat* in this valley who shared their wisdom and love of peace so it grows in each generation, and of course, *Migtanghaga*, the Creator of all and of all times. And so we grow in trust and in the covenant of peace, *nalandangan*, that we share in by being here.

I have already indicated the importance of *kagēna* and *gaup*, culture and land are inseparable, and this is what

for thousands of years has made community viable yet vulnerable. Today, we talk of countries as economies, ranging from first world to third and even fourth world. The world speaks of the land as a resource often without its people, while 'nature' and cities count as tourist destinations – but only cities are seen as sustaining life and growth. There is often a wishful or wistful value given to culture and the land – for all is progress in today's language.

I want to thank Vicky Tauli-Corpuz for coming to this graduation and sharing with us. Some 25 years ago, we worked with several communities at the same time as we worked in Bendum. We accompanied her community, the iBesao, in their legal rights to an ancestral domain, and I want to remember other iBesao community members, Modesto Gaab who wanted to be with us and Dallay Annawi who has visited us before. We continue to work on the Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan (ADSDPP) here in Bendum and share an integral management of resources for greater ecological services that are never paid for nor adequately incorporated in the present model of development.

We have been holding a forum over the last few days. This forum is about culture and integrity. Why these words? I have alluded to much of what culture is already: *kalikat, gaup, Migtanghaga daw tanghaga, pandawat, nalandangan, paglaum hu kahigayunan, pēgliliungan sa maayad ha pagibit*.



These is no living culture without lands, unless the community has been dispossessed and evicted. We are talking of something very different when we talk of urban culture. We love to celebrate in the Philippines and discuss the number of languages we have, but it is a struggle to make sure and to secure for future generations the continuity, the integrity of these cultures and communities.



The identity of many of these cultures today is weak, and, given an option, most will flee to the city to be absorbed into the informal sector with little chance of upliftment and of being together. They go to schools while their roots wither, though dress and dance may still flower for a time. There is nothing that sustains their culture in a living community, so they outgrow their culture. It dies as a way of life and becomes merely, at times, a livelihood. They see no future in their culture, they see no dignity given to their culture, and the integrity of holding together falls away.

Part of this effect of integrity is it gives a stronger local context to build on and create opportunity, *kahigayunan*, with the youth. With opportunity comes responsibility and more relationship. What we seek to teach here is this sense of community responsibility and leadership of service, *pēgpangamangēl*.

What we try to do here in Bendum is create a space, to accompany, *dumala*, to open a dialogue, *amulamul*, so that the youth can define their identity, tuus, and sense of belonging in this world; bridging, in a way, so we can

hear the other.

In this way, we recognize a culture’s uniqueness and contribution to society, and work with society emerges. We work with sustaining and securing water, learning, forests, and food. This is what gives peace, hope, and integrity. When a culture can express a gratitude for life, a people can look for a way of life that will form a more sustainable livelihood.

When we go deeper than the global economy (and consumerism) like when we engage in support of the Sustainable Development Goals, we are more likely to recognize the struggles to improve the quality of life, and understand how community strengthens commitment, *pēgliliungan sa maayad ha pagibit*.



We also recognize that none of these goals will be achieved without communities that share a hope for their youth at home – *paglaum hu kahigayunan*.

Hope and opportunity are what we share here and I thank you for joining us and celebrating this with us and the youth who seek to learn. ◆

## APC indigenous youth join global climate movement...

*continued from page 3*

Discussions and workshops on the global climate movement and local actions to mitigate climate change are sustained in APC beyond the school strike. According to Ms. Jenny Lynn Lee, APC School Manager, the school also wants to connect with parents and community leaders and members for a broader climate change education and action next school year.

“It is our duty to the planet and to our students to continue to accompany them in this process of learning, reflecting and taking action on the climate crisis,” she said.

Jason Menaling said that previous Laudato Si’ discussions inspired much of the call for action as the affirmation of the unique role of Indigenous Peoples in caring for Creation is very strong in the document. He added that the call for action with commitment and hope empowers the youth to act while experiencing a deeper spiritual understanding of life. ◆



Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center

## Bendum News



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