



December 9th, 2014

Most Honorable Jose Chaves Alvarez, Governor of Palawan  
Honorable Dennis Socrates, Vice-Governor of Palawan  
Capitol Building, Rizal Avenue, Puerto Princesa City, 5300  
Palawan, Philippines

**Dear Governor and Vice Governor of Palawan,**

The International Society of Ethnobiology is a global, collaborative network of individuals and organizations working to preserve vital links between human societies and the natural world. Ethnobiologists recognize that indigenous peoples and local communities are critical to the conservation of biological and cultural diversity.

The ISE's Darrell Posey Fellowship Program has had a long-standing relationship with a number of Philippine Indigenous Peoples' organizations and NGOs who have been awarded our Field Fellowships and Small Grants. We have long been aware that the Philippines sets the world an inspiring example of both strong indigenous rights legislation (e.g. the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act) as well as proactive institutions for conserving bio-cultural diversity (e.g. the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development).

However, we have been following with great attention and considerable concern the recent controversies related to the massive expansion of oil palm plantations in your province ("the Philippines' Last Frontier"). Indeed, we are extremely worried that oil palm companies are planning to convert an area between 15,000 to 20,000 hectares in the Palawan Man & Biosphere Reserve into oil palm monocultures. As we have learned, about 6,000 ha have already been cleared for this purpose, endangering biodiversity, water resources, topsoil quality and the livelihood of farmers and indigenous peoples, while exacerbating rural poverty. If oil palm expansion is allowed to continue, the environmental and ecological sustainability of the province and people's food security will be severely compromised.



Oil palm monoculture development is not just a regional Palawan issue, it is a national issue which has already proven to have detrimental consequences in parts of Mindanao, as well as in Bohol and has also brought misery to the life of indigenous peoples and farmers worldwide. Case studies from Eastern Malaysia, Indonesia, Latina America and Africa provide clear examples of the negative impact of oil palm plantations on both the environment and local livelihoods. We hope that this accumulating evidence will persuade your government to put a halt to industrial agricultural schemes that are geared towards export and do not foster local consumption.

Surely, micro-credit programs for small land holders and public investments to support peasant agriculture, family farming, artisanal fishing and indigenous food procurement systems would be better suited to the specific socio-cultural and ecological conditions of Palawan Island. We believe that the commitment of Philippine's government to resolve food security, to improve farmers' economy and to safeguard indigenous peoples' ancestral domains, is not compatible with the ongoing attempt of converting precious forest and agricultural land into oil palm plantations.

We are aware that on 29 September, Hon. Dennis Socrates met a delegation of farmers and indigenous peoples being represented by the recently established Coalition against Land Grabbing (CALG). CALG's members, accompanied by Bishop Pedro Arrigo from the Apostolic Vicariate of Palawan, have delivered a petition signed by almost 4,300 individuals belonging to oil palm impacted communities who are asking to pass a moratorium on the expansion of oil palm plantations.

Not only do we support the farmers', cooperatives' and indigenous peoples' call for a moratorium but we also fully endorse all key demands listed in the 'moratorium petition'. We have been informed that, recently, the petition signed by farmers and indigenous peoples was taken up on First Reading during the 61st Regular Session of the Sangguniang Panlalawigan (the provincial government) and it was then referred to the Committee on Environment for further action. We hope that this move will lead, as soon as possible, to constructive negotiations



between CALG's representatives and concerned government agencies and, finally, to the issuance of a moratorium on oil palm expansion,

We urge your government to act promptly on this, before the adverse and socio-ecological implications of oil palm expansion become irreversible.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Mary Stockdale

Chair of the Darrell Posey Fellowship Program,

The International Society of Ethnobiology: an Alliance for Bio-cultural Diversity

<http://ethnobiology.net/>

Copy Furnished:

- Hon. H.E. Benigno C. Aquino III, President of the Republic
- Dr. Marlea Pinor Munez, Executive Director, National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP)
- Mr. Ruben S. Bastero, Regional Director RIV (NCIP)
- Mrs. Dionisia Banua, Commissioner (NCIP)
- Hon. Ramon Jesus Paje, Secretary Department of Environment and Natural Resources
- Hon. Proceso J. Alcala, Secretary Department of Agriculture (DA)
- Hon. Euclides G. Forbes and Mr. Carlos B. Carpio (Philippine Coconut Authority - PCA)
- Executive Director: Mr. Nelson P. Devanadera, Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD)
- Mrs. Mearl Hilario, PCSD Committee on Tribal Affairs
- Mrs. Gilda E. Pico, President and CEO, Land Bank of the Philippines