

CELEBRATING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' MONTH

by Don Guerra
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Last October 19 to 21, 2006 a conference project of the Sub commission on Cultural Communities and Traditional Arts, National Commission for Culture and the Arts was held at the Philippines Social Science Center Auditorium, Commonwealth Avenue, Quezon City. Aptly entitled "APPROPRIATING INDIGENOUS CULTURES IN THE PHILIPPINES: FESTIVALS AND OTHER SPECTACLES", the three-day national conference was part of the celebration of the Indigenous Peoples' Month in October.

Concerted efforts were geared toward such intellectual gathering in response to the increasing appropriation of intangible and tangible cultural materials from indigenous cultures in the Philippines in festivals and other local events.

In some ways, as the Department of Tourism tries to repackage the Philippines as a Festival country among other concerns, the said increasing appropriation of indigenous cultural materials has generated mixed reactions from various stakeholders, namely, the indigenous peoples themselves, cultural workers, art practitioners, academics, and media practitioners.

This NCCA project has provided the forum for interactions between indigenous peoples and the various social forces and communities that engaged them in different aspects of cultural production. In this conference, various modes of appropriation of indigenous cultures, including their positive and negative effects, on the lives of indigenous peoples were identified. A good example of this is Mr. Steven Patrick Fernandez' paper that deals with the negative effects of appropriating indigenous cultural materials into street dancing which results into misrepresentation and mediocrity.

Thus, while much of the conference was given over to exploring the domain and parameters of this issue, practical matters were also considered. Policy implications of the various modes of appropriation on the protection and promotion of the indigenous cultures in the Philippines were determined as well. Effective measures were drawn out to minimize the gap between the original sources of indigenous cultural materials and the end users. In particular, three different workshop sessions led by specialists from the NCCA were held to focus on these measures:

- Governance and Cultural Rights;
- Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act and Copyright; and
- Managing Cultural Creativity.

However, it is imperative to generate wider participation of the numerous different sectors and to exert efforts in developing and implementing more substantial indigenous cultural fora and institutions, not only in time for the celebration of the Indigenous

Peoples' Month, but as a continuous and ongoing program. For more insights on the conference "Appropriating Indigenous Cultures in the Philippines: Festivals and other Spectacles", visit www.ncca.gov.ph or email at info@ncca.gov.ph.

My outmost gratitude goes to the *Kalinawa Art Foundation* (www.kalinawa.com ; info@kalinawa.com) thru its founders Mr. and Mrs. David and Margarita Gilinsky and *Kalinawa Art Foundation* Senior Adviser Mr. Carlton B. Hughes for realizing my participation in the recently concluded National Indigenous Peoples' Congress in Manila thus allowing me to bring the information nearer to the people of Zamboanga del Norte and other neighbouring provinces.

Note:

To secure support from the *Kalinawa Art Foundation* to attend this conference, Mr. Gurrea provided two things. First, he submitted a very convincing and detailed written request as to why the *Foundation* should provide support. Second, he undertook the commitment to provide a written account of his observations. Note should be made that this report was also published on page 5 of the 28 October 2006 edition of *Press Freedom* (A Dipolog City - based weekly newspaper).

