

Keynote Message---11th Igorot International Consultation
By Maximo B. Dalog

The members of the officialdom of our province, kakailian, officials, members of the Igorot Global Organization, visitors, guests, friends, fellow Igorots, fellow Cordillerans, ladies and gentlemen.

Gawis ay agew tako am-in. A pleasant day to all of us.

Let me join our officialdom, the ten municipalities, the 144 barangays and the people of this only province in our country with an English name—Mountain Province, in extending our heartiest welcome to all of you. Gawis tay inmali kayo amin. Gawis ubpay nan kasin suma-a. It is nice to be back home again.

Let me also express on behalf of our people, our sincerest gratitude to the officers and members of the IGO for choosing our humble province as the venue of your IIC. This is a joyous and historic event to us, whence for the first time, a conference of this magnitude and with an international flavour, with participants coming from all parts of the globe is being held in our capital town of Bontoc. It is definitely a great honor and a privilege to host this prestigious gathering.

Our theme for this conference is “Understanding each other, celebrating together” is apt and fitting especially at this point in time when there are still issues and concerns about our identity as a people, that we have to resolve and understand for indeed how can we celebrate together when we do not understand each other.

The first and foremost issue that we have to resolve and understand is the question: Who are really the Igorots? We have to answer this question considering that there are some members of certain tribes in the Cordilleras who do not refer to themselves as Igorots like for instance, the Kalingas, they call themselves iKalinga not Igorots and this is also true to some if not most of the people from Ifugao, they call themselves Ifugaos. Apparently, the only people in the Cordilleras who are referred to as Igorots by some of our fellow Cordillerans are the people of Mountain Province and Benguet.

In one issue of the Philippine Daily Inquirer (Sunday, January 2016, p. 14; Young Blood), a certain Hendrix C. Bongalon stated and I quote, “parents ko lang po (only my parents), the young lady said when asked if she is Igorot.” The response of the young lady and the perception of some of our fellow Cordillerans make us ask the question—Why is it that some people in the Cordillera seem to deny their Igorot identity? Who is really an Igorot, is it determined by one’s residence, place of birth or by bloodline?

Well, if you will permit me, I will try to answer the aforesaid questions based solely on my personal understanding, research and viewpoint.

From the accounts of early anthropologists and ethnographers, we read that the Spanish conquistadores who first made contact with the people of the Cordilleras called our ancestors

Igorots or Ygorotes or Ygolots which, according to these accounts mean people of or from the mountains.

Used in that sense, the term Igorot is neutral as it merely denoted a particular group of people living in a particular place. But over time with the continued attempt of the Spanish colonizers to subjugate our ancestors, certain negative connotations were gradually attached to the word Igorot until it became a derogatory term.

The derogatory connotation of the term Igorot for which reason some of us Cordillerans deny our Igorot identity has therefore a solid historical basis. For more than 300 years, the Spanish colonizers despite repeated attempts, failed to tame and subjugate and make our ancestors loyal and paying subjects of the King of Spain. And as time went on and the Igorots continued to defy the pacification moves of the Spanish colonizers, the latter started describing our ancestors as ignorant, rebellious, treasonous, murderous, primitive pagans. The more the Igorots refused to be drawn in the purview of the Spanish Crown, the more the Spaniards and their lowland subjects delighted in denigrating our Igorot ancestor. It was the psychological law of “man disparaging what he cannot obtain”. Differently stated, the Spaniards were only sour graping.

*The final turn of the screw of the denigration of our ancestors by the Spaniards came with the exposition of the Philippine Islands in the Madrid Zoological Gardens towards the end of the Spanish Regime in 1887. (Scott, William Henry. *Looking for the Pre-Hispanic Filipino*. 1992 ed.) According to the accounts of the Exponent of Igorotism, Sir William Henry Scott in his book, “Looking for the Prehispanic Filipino” pages 7-8 1992 ed., “what was to attract the most attention—an Igorot village where six Bontoc warriors, battle-scarred and tattooed were exhibited and their naked musculature measured. Jose Rizal wrote in anguish:*

“I worked hard against this degradation of my fellow Filipinos that they should not be exhibited among the animals and plants! But I was helpless... I would rather that they all got sick and died so they would not suffer more. Let the Philippines forget that her sons have been treated like this!”

The derogation or demonization of our Igorot ancestors continued during the American Regime. Although the Americans succeeded where the Spaniards failed due to their arguably superior style of administration, they did something which additionally contributed to the very wrong image drawn up of Igorots. When the American Colonial Government exhibited some Igorots at St. Louis Exposition in 1903-1904. These Igorots were housed in a compound fashioned to resemble an Igorot village. There the American public, came to stare, gape and gawk at them like some animals in a zoo. And if you consider that the Igorots on exhibit were billed as “the wild men of Luzon,” you should not be surprised why some who witnessed the exhibit were reportedly heard exclaiming, “*oh what savages.*” Thus, did the American public got their first impression of our Igorot ancestors. The St. Louis Exposition was one of the topics of the late brilliant Bishop Francisco F. Claver during the same IGO Consultation back in 2004 at St. Louis, Missouri, USA of which I am certain most of you have attended.

Not only the Spaniards and the Americans contributed to the derogation of the Igorots, unfortunately, even some of our fellow Filipinos demonized us Igorots, looking down at us as

inferiors. This denigration reached its apex when the eminent Carlos P. Romulo stated in his book, *Mother America* that—“The Igorot is not Filipino.”

This historical and institutionalized bias against us Igorots continued up to these contemporary times. There are people like Jun Labo, Candy Pangilinan, Louie Garcia, Miraflor Matalino to name a few who still think that we are inferior and not equal to them and are therefore beyond the pale of their society. Although these people made a public apology of the tribal slur that they uttered against us, it is a telling blow of what others think of us. No wonder some of us Igorots do not want to be known as such.

Now the question arises: is it right to deny one's origin? That is a subjective question and if you ask it to three different persons you may receive three different answers. But personally, I say it is definitely wrong because it has no justification. In the first place you did not choose your origin so you are not responsible for it. Where then is the need to deny? If you were born a Negrito, you will be a Negrito until your death. Nothing you do can change your “Negrito-ness.” In our case, we were born Igorots so Igorots we are, Igorots we shall be and Igorots we shall remain. No artifice we employ can conceal, much less expunge, our Igorot identity.

So what should we do?

To me, there is only one thing to do: accept that we are Igorot, by birth and by culture, and face the implicit and explicit consequences of being one. There is no shame in being an Igorot. If we reflect on our past, there are many things we can be proud of. Think of our warrior-ancestors. They had an innate love of independence and possessed indomitable courage. It was due to these two qualities above everything that made the Spaniards unable to subjugate us from the time they first started their colonization of the Philippines up to the very end of their regime. This is very striking if you compare it with the ease and speed with which they dominated and “tamed” the inhabitants of the lowlands. The lowlanders made only token resistances before toeing the line of the invaders. Not so with the Igorots. They fought tooth and nail to keep their independence. If, as mentioned earlier, our ancestors were overcome on occasions, they always managed to break free and resume their independent ways. It's not hard to imagine the exasperation and frustration this recalcitrance caused the invaders. Neither is it hard to understand why the Spaniards resorted to name-calling.

This courage, bravery and love of freedom was again demonstrated in the battle of Bataan when our gallant Igorot soldiers exposed themselves to enemy fire to serve as eyes for the American tanks, firing with their pistols while guiding the tank drivers. At the end of the day, the Igorot soldiers together with the Americans annihilated the 20th Japanese Infantry Regiment. General Douglas MacArthur said of our Igorot soldiers and I quote:

“Many desperate acts of courage and heroism have fallen under my observation on many fields of battle in many parts of the world. I have seen forlorn hopes become realities. I have seen last-ditch stands and innumerable acts of personal heroism that defy description, but for sheer breathtaking and heart stopping desperation, I have never known the equal of those Igorots riding the tanks. Gentlemen, when you tell the story stand in tribute to those gallant Igorots.”

But courage and love of independence are by no means the only admirable qualities possessed by Igorots. There are many others. Enumerating them all would take a full volume. There is no need to do that here because there are many in depth studies of Igorot culture mentioning these, written by eminently competent ethnographers—both Igorot and non- Igorot—which those sincerely interested in learning about Igorots can avail of. But just one more food for thought for Igorot-bashers: if the Igorots of old were indeed savages, how can we account for their skill in building the numerous rice terraces in their mountainous habitats? The stone-walled rice terraces which were declared by the UNESCO as World Heritage were constructed with engineering precision which still intrigues scientists today. Were those the handiwork of ignorant savages?

Just look around today. Haven't Igorots entered and made good in almost all fields of civilized human pursuits and occupations such as the academe, research networks, sports, entertainment, politics and many others? And they did these not only in their home country but abroad as well, which makes them, in a manner of speaking, world-class. And to think that only a century ago, our forefathers were going around in loin cloth or tapis in their secluded mountain villages! From loin-cloth to coat and tie, from ax to computer, from thatched hut to mansion—all in just a hundred years! That's progress! That's transcendence!

I salute the officers and members of the IGO. Your organization is one of the amalgams that is holding the Igorot nation together while others are very reluctant and even deny that they are Igorots, you are there, proudly proclaiming to the whole world that you are one. For as aptly stated by William Henry Scott in his book *Looking for the PreHispanic Filipino* and I quote: "It is a fond adage of historians that a people without a history is a people without a soul." So that we eagerly search for our history and roots and our roots is this sacred Igorot land, the Cordilleras where we and our forebears were borne and nurtured.

Now that we have understood our Igorot identity, let us celebrate together, enjoy and savor our history and culture. We invite everybody to join us in the celebration of the Lang-ay Festival.

By the grace of Almighty God, Gawis ay Mountain Province, Gawis ay Cordillera.

Message delivered during the Opening Ceremonies of the 11th IIC held at Teng-ab Conference Hall on April 7, 2016.