

## RESPONSES\* OF COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES

### *Representative No. 1*

We would like to thank you for giving us the chance to meet the people from whom we can expect help for the problems in Abra. Last September 25, a resolution was sent to President Marcos asking for the protection of our inheritance, specifically of our ancestral lands which we have inherited from our forefathers. We also asked for protection against disturbances that might be brought about by CRC. Up to now we have not been answered. In Bangilo there is at present a deplorable situation. People are afraid to say what they have in mind because when they do, they are ridiculed as having the brains of a snake or a monkey. So, many prefer to keep quiet and even show consent when they are really opposed.

The people in Abra, particularly in Bangilo, Malibcong live peacefully as shown by the fact that no cases have been filed in the municipal court of Malibcong, because there are no cases to file. Also, the people have no need for economic upliftment because they can support themselves including those who come to their territory. If you want to find out for yourselves, you can go there and you will not spend even one centavo. There are no restaurants there. A visitor is always invited to the house of a native and is protected until he leaves the place. He should never be asked when he plans to leave nor whether he has already eaten. That would be insulting. Instead the host should cook right away and feed the visitor. This custom of ours will surely be destroyed when our culture will be destroyed with the coming of CRC. We have become very apprehensive because of the nightclubs and discos that are being set up with the coming of CRC. For us this is not the happiness that we want.

### *Representative No. 2*

I would like to speak in the dialect to emphasize once more that there is such a cultural group that speaks this language in one of the remote areas in the Cordillera. I will not speak completely in Ilocano because the ideas that I would like to express might not come out exactly as I hope them to; that is why I will speak in the dialect.

There is a nagging question at present among my people and this is: Why has CRC been allowed to cut pine trees and other ancient trees when these provide the source of life of the people there? We depend for our living upon these trees. Our lands are mostly agricultural and well-irrigated so that we can farm twice or even thrice a year because of the streams running down

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\*These responses were lifted from the tapes and, unless otherwise specified, translated to English by Max Garming.

the mountainsides. This would be impossible if the trees are destroyed. I remembered too well that when I was still a kid in the elementary grades, people from Mindanao came to buy ancient jars and Chinese plates, especially the dragon jars. Although we consider these as valuable inheritance from our ancestors, we were willing to part with them when we knew that our brothers from Mindanao needed them. Commercialism is not a manner of life among my people. We have been taught to be more concerned with charity, that is why we do not hesitate to spend everything we have to help a fellowman who comes to us.

When CRC came, the first thing we noticed is that the personnel of the company brought along with them their own provisions. And then the slaughter of dogs started, soap prices went up and worst, there was no more brotherhood. When you needed something, you had to pay a high price for it. The company tried to assure us of economic and financial upliftment but their promises have remained unfulfilled. The involvement of politicians and military men further aggravated the situation and entirely destroyed the people's faith. Even the mayor in that area is not really looked upon as the real leader. What is proposed by the elders is usually approved by the community. That is what the people follow — not what a mayor or a ranking official signs. In fact, even a written agreement duly signed externally does not matter to us. Even a verbal agreement is respected provided it has already been agreed upon during an honest-to-goodness dialogue between the leaders and the people.

We have been promised employment in CRC, but I don't think it is possible that all of us can be absorbed. Some of us are sickly, while others are not technically qualified. Besides, at present we can support even big families from the produce of the lands we till, while those who work with CRC have found out that their salaries are barely enough for their basic necessities. The coming of CRC has not in actuality raised our standard of living. Therefore, if there is really a need for the company to come in, the demands of the people for adequate settlement should first be satisfied.

### *Representative No. 3*

We are grateful that friends like you are here to listen to our plight. The people in our municipality are suffering as a result of the way the new mayor, a military man from Benguet, runs the place. He calls endless meetings even at night and the agenda is always about Cellophil. When questions are asked about CRC, he avoids them and instead hurls personal insults at us, calling us names and saying that we are behaving like monkeys and look like negritos or Aetas. He even asks why our teeth are red. The old folks usually become his targets of criticism because even with regards to clothing, their ideas are different. For them to wear clothes that are torn is a sign of sacrifice so that they could send their children to school. They are even ashamed to wear good pants; they prefer to wear old pants so that their townmates would not think

bad of them. Even combing the hair is considered a waste so they do not indulge in it. Not understanding these values, the mayor has failed to establish rapport with the people. When they do not do exactly as he wants them to, he immediately accuses them of being subversives. When they gather together informally, they are also suspected of planning something against the government. Even prayer meetings which have become customary are now prohibited.

*Representative No. 4\**

Now I think the emcee has given me the privilege to speak. I will speak right away in English so that I do not need to translate my talk.

You know in Abra there is no community paper where you can express your ideas. There is only one radio station which is owned by the missionaries and of course you know what kind of programs they would like to put on the air. So it is a rare opportunity for us to be given a chance to speak, even only to speak. We do not know if something will come out of this, but at least we can express what we have in mind since we cannot do this through any other media. With most of the members of the audience coming from Manila, we hope they can help us disseminate what is really happening in Abra and not what is just told them by some sectors. In the papers and TV programs lately, there have been remarks that there is some kind of subversion or subversive activities in some municipalities in Abra. If you take opposition in various degrees to the entry of Cellophil Corporation into Tinggian territories or ancestral lands as subversive, then you may say that subversive activities are going on. However, if by subversion is meant fighting or plotting against the government, then I really doubt that there is such a thing in those municipalities. So we do not see any reason why there should be a military mayor in Malibcong.

With regards to the entry of Cellophil Corporation, as this is really the question at the moment in this area, there are three kinds of reaction on the part of the people. I want to talk about these because you must have been reading in some publications that there have been agreements between the people and Cellophil. What has actually happened is that one or two municipal officials who in the eyes of the community are not necessarily the spokesmen of the people, enter into agreement without consulting the people. I am talking specifically of what has happened in Bangilo because I am sure of what they think there.

The first reaction of the people to the attempted entry of Cellophil was outright opposition; the second, qualified or conditional acceptance; and the third, unconditional acceptance. At the moment, there is only one man in Bangilo who is wholeheartedly for the entry of Cellophil. He is a government

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\*The following response was delivered in English.

official. The others are identified with the first and second groups; namely, outright opposition and conditional acceptance. Those who are totally opposed are those who are skeptical about the fulfillment of the promises made to the people by those who are pretending to speak for the company but in fact are mere employees who are just expressing their opinions and also those people in the area who believe that Abra can be industrialized but not necessarily in the manner that Cellophil would like it to be. Those who adhere to the second group; that is, conditional acceptance, are those who believe and are willing to contribute their part to bring about the common good and economic upliftment for Abra in particular and the Philippines in general. At first those who were totally opposed were much more than those who were willing to accept the coming of the company. As for me, although I may be criticized by some of my companions, I still prefer qualified acceptance of the company because I believe that when you want the whole to improve, there is always a sacrifice from some parts. You cannot avoid that. However, I would like to put the emphasis on the word "qualified" rather than on "acceptance." This qualification is found on page 8 of the brochure. I will just read a part which is found at the bottom of the page:

This condition should be that the CRC should enter into an agreement with the people and this agreement should include the exclusion of communal forests and pasture lands from the concession, respect for the watersheds, the use of roads rather than the rivers to transport the logs, and that each family, if it is possible, be given the percentage of the profit accruing to CRC because not everybody can really enter into the workforce of the company. The customs and especially the provisions of the peace pact in that area should also be respected.

Perhaps an outsider in that area cannot realize the burden of being a peace pact holder. Once a crime is committed, it will be taken as an act against the brotherhood. Damages have to be resolved in order that things can be right again. Therefore, crime in the eyes of the people can be erased and that future generations should accept this. You see, people do not ask who is at fault anymore. The life of a person who is related to one who has committed a crime is also in danger. One of the provisions of the peace pact is that one who kills will also be killed. Christianity has tried to modify this practice but not all would accept the modification. Consequently, the elders of Bangilo are afraid because of the troubles that are now brewing. They are afraid that once it starts, an endless strife will surely follow. I do not like to imagine that in a gathering like this years after we have separated, one of my co-Tingians will again stand before the assembly only to shed tears and try to laugh his problems off because it is the only thing he can do. Of course, there is still something worse than shedding tears, and that is the shedding of blood. I

hope this conference will be able to do something before anything untoward happens.