

Preserving living traditions

PHILIPPINE cultural minorities enjoy the right of being different. While welcoming into the mainstream of Philippine society certain ethnic groups who seek full integration into the large community, the government is also preserving the original lifeways of those who prefer to remain what they are beside that larger community. Thus, the protection of their right of choice involves the preservation of their environment and original lifeways which have taken thousands of years to develop.

The Philippine government's policy of preserving the epoch-evolved environment of life is based on the belief that there is a wisdom of the past to which primitive man is close, and from which modern man can learn requisites of his survival.

The value of this wisdom was very well put by Charles A. Lindbergh in his foreword to John Nance's *The Gentle Traditions*: "During decades of civil and military fighting, I had watched tremendous changes take place on the surface of the earth. Slowly at first, rapidly later, forests disappeared, hills eroded, smoke polluted air, and wastes polluted water. Plants and animals that nature spent years in perfecting vanished, and men began crowding themselves into megapolised cities that spread like swabs over the countryside..."

"Before the impact of the human mind, life developed in beauty, variety and fluctuating balance. One sees that in the few virgin wilderness remaining—the perfection of their animals, the magnificence of their trees, plants, and flowers. In them, life and its environment interweave a pattern to which man has ascribed the term 'divine.'"

"Only thereafter did the breakdown of heredity and environment begin, and only in our present generation has that breakdown assumed catastrophic form," wrote Lindbergh.

In the Philippines, one of the major concerns of the government has to do with the preservation of what the nation has, in terms of what the Filipinos possess of their Asian past. And this means not only preserving but also developing, giving new dimensions to the creative spirit that produced the past, so that it may continue to enrich the present.

Enjoying this protection are some five million Filipinos classified into 60 ethno-linguistic "national minority groups." The most unique of these are the Tasadays, an ethnic group in the highlands of Southern Cebu in the Philippines, that had eluded modern man for a thousand years before first contact in 1971. The coming of the first outsiders to the Tasadays' cave home marked the end of centuries of isolation for this unique people.

The largest minority groups are the Muslims—the Tausug, Samal, Maranao and Maguindanao—who number around three million. These groups, while belonging to the minority, actually constitute the dominant society in their areas

of habitation and are represented in the national government. They elect their own provincial governors, town mayors and village chiefs.

The rest of the minority groups are non-Christian, non-Muslim peoples who are equally extended medical, material, advisory or developmental assistance.

In order to allow the Filipino ethnic groups to lead a life of their own choice, President Ferdinand E. Marcos decreed the ownership of ancestral lands by the cultural minorities.

President Marcos has decreed that lands of the public domain occupied and cultivated by members of national cultural communities, either by themselves or their predecessors or ancestors for a minimum of 30 years before March 11, 1974, shall be granted to such minorities. Aside from this, the President proclaimed the reservation of lands for settlement purposes of the national cultural minorities.

On April 7, 1972, President Marcos signed a proclamation reserving 19,249 hectares in which the Tasaday and their next-door neighbor, the Manobo Ebu, may live as they choose.

In this natural habitat, the Tasadays remind the modern man of the need for a balance in his life style which should be his *aparture* toward survival and security.

The late Lindbergh made this quite clear when he wrote: "At the end, it leaves you pondering the future for both cave and twentieth century man. For the market of human life, the Tasaday challenges modern man with his cave against the lean-tos of slums and his beautiful positive emotions against modern man's asphalt jungle and continual wess of hatred and greed."

The government's policy of encour-

aging the minorities to develop their own cultures, and at the same time to fuse with the mainstream of Philippine society, is reflected in the educational program for cultural minorities. The PANAMIN, the government agency with cabinet rank for cultural minorities, has sponsored an educational program which emphasizes the indigenous cultural content in the curriculum. There are now ten PANAMIN-operated schools in minority areas inhabited by T'bolis, Blaans, Maguindanaos, Mansakas, Higaonons, Atis, Bataks and Hunuons.

The educational program for the minorities meets the real needs of their environment and, because their ancient values and cultures are given importance, deepens their appreciation of the more valuable aspects of their own rich culture.

At the same time, the State Scholarship Council of the Department of Education and Culture has taken a second look at the scholarship grants to members of the cultural tribes. The council has increased the number of grants that will be more beneficial to the minorities themselves and the community in which they live. Grants of the State Scholarship Council have been expanded to include graduate programs.

All in all, the educational program is part of the government effort to enhance appreciation for the ancient values of the nation, both among the tribesmen and the public at large.

While aiming to preserve the natural environment of the ethnic groups, the Philippine government has been extending assistance programs to the cultural tribes. Medical missions have been conducted in 105 towns all over the Philippines bringing medical help to the minorities.

The government operates 18 pro-

jects, 14 of which are socio-economic and one, a research project. The socio-economic development projects are situated in Negros (Ati), Palawan (Batak) and Mindanao (Samal, Higaonon, Mansaka, T'boli, Ubo, and Blaani). The Manobo Ebu-Tasaday Reservation is primarily a research project geared toward protecting the unique Tasaday people. In these projects, the government insures that the minorities themselves retain the option of preserving their traditional ways of life, or if they so desire, changing these at the pace they choose.

The Philippine government's policy of protecting the right of its minorities to maintain their cultural integrity was lauded recently by Dr. Ireneaus Eibl-Eibesfeldt, noted German scientist of the famed Max Planck Institute.

In a communication to fellow scientists, Dr. Eibl-Eibesfeldt said the Philippines' official acknowledgment of "the right to be different" constitutes a "progressive breakthrough and that this policy has laid the foundation for continued cultural evolution."

Dr. Eibl-Eibesfeldt, who heads the research group for Human Ethnology at Max Planck, said after his visit to the Philippines: "In many parts of the world, the beauty of cultural diversity is not yet seen and cultures which have taken thousands of years to develop are vanishing within decades."

He continued: "In a pioneering way that will provide a precedent, the Republic of the Philippines, sponsored by the personal interest of President Marcos and Madame Imelda R. Marcos, the First Lady of the state, has laid the foundation which will allow the minorities to continue their way of cultural evolution and thus contribute to the particular richness of the Philippines." □



The right to be different.



Cultural minorities: protecting the beauty of cultural diversity.