

15 February 2016

Hon. Lucilo Bayron
Mayor, Puerto Princesa City

Cc:

CENRO

CITY ENRO

PCSD

NCIP-PALAWAN

Office of the Governor

Hon. Mayor of Brooke's Point

Dear Mayor Bayron,

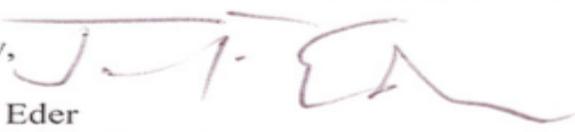
Greetings from Arizona! I write to briefly but emphatically urge you to modify the city's present "no burn" and related policies to make it possible for Batak and Tagbanua to resume their traditional—and, despite misapprehensions and misunderstandings to the contrary, environmentally sustainable—practices of long-fallow *kaingin*-making. I write as an anthropologist with many of years of experience in Palawan, researching about the lives and livelihoods of the province's indigenous, migrant, and migrant-origin peoples. Over the years, my research has come to span many topics and locales, but through it all has run a deeply-felt concern for the lives and well-being of Palawan's indigenous and other local residents. My research has also been contextualized by considerable time depth; I first went to Palawan in 1965, to begin a two-year stint teaching biology at PNS, and I plan to return again this April, for what will be my 25th visit. Thus I have witnessed and, in small ways, been caught up in the many changes that have occurred there during this period.

One important strand of my research has concerned agricultural choice and change, particularly among Palawan's upland residents and, more particularly still, among the Batak. Based on my firsthand observations in the interior of Bgy. Langogan (where I once lived for more than a year) and, importantly, my reading of the relevant scholarly literature, it is simply not true that properly-practiced shifting cultivation--and it has indeed been properly practiced by Palawan's indigenous peoples, when and where they have been allowed to do so--does the environmental damage today attributed to it by misguided government policies. On the contrary, the "integral" shifting cultivation customarily practiced by Palawan's indigenous people stands in marked contrast to the "pioneer" shifting cultivation characteristically practiced by migrant and migrant-origin peoples. While the latter is often indeed destructive of forest resources, the former typically supports agro-ecologically diverse stands of staples, vegetables and fruit trees in

different fallow stages and can even enhance biodiversity by creating a mosaic of primary and secondary-growth forests.

In short, properly-practiced *kaingin*—and again, Palawan’s indigenous peoples know how to properly practice it—simply does not do the environmental damage often attributed to it. On the contrary, *kaingin* supports livelihoods and enables indigenous peoples to sustain their cultural heritage over time. And these are not just the romantic thoughts of naïve anthropologists; they are supported and confirmed by numerous scientific studies, in Palawan and elsewhere in the Philippines and beyond.

Sincerely,



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