Palawan Projects aid "vanishing" Batak tribe

The Palawan Projects of the National Power Corporation recently donated food and other relief goods to 47 families belonging to the indigenous Batak tribe in Barangay Tanabag in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan.

Held last May 19, the outreach activity was Palawan Projects' response to an appeal made by Barangay Captain Glenn Mojagan, who said that the crops of the Batak tribe had been destroyed by the lingering dry spell brought by the El Niño phenomenon. The Batak subsist on farming and on harvesting non-timber forest products like rattan, tree resins and honey.

Led by their manager, Romualdo A. Consigna, the employees of Palawan Projects braved the rocky and rugged terrain leading to the Batak settlement, which is located approximately 64 kilometers away from Puerto Princesa City. There, they turned over food items like rice, bread, biscuits, instant noodles, milk, coffee, sugar and canned sardines to the elders and the chieftains of the tribe. A few days later, Mr. Consigna returned to the settlement with a handful of employees and brought used clothes, bath soap, detergent, kitchenware (plastic plates and tumblers), plastic pails, dippers (tabo) and basins for the Batak families.

The Batak are one of the estimated 70 indigenous tribes that can be found in the Philippines. Peaceful and shy by nature, the tribe dwells in the mountains of northeastern Palawan, hence the name “Batak” (which means “mountain people”).

Also called “Tinitianes”, the Batak tribe is considered by anthropologists to be closely related to the Aetas of Central Luzon, due to their physical characteristics — dark skin, short, curly hair, and generally small stature.

In recent years, there have been concerns that hunger and disease may turn the Batak into a “vanishing tribe”. From an estimated 900 in the 1970s, the number of Batak tribesmen had dwindled to only 364, according to a year 2000 census by the National Statistics Office. Rapid depopulation, limited forest access, and incursion by immigrants have also decimated the ranks of the Batak tribe.

The Cultural Minorities Outreach Program of Palawan Projects is in line with President Froilan Tampinco’s directive that NPC strengthen its Corporate Social Responsibility functions. Following the recent changes in NPC’s organizational and financial structure, these CSR efforts will be primarily geared in the missionary areas being serviced by the Small Power Utilities Group. Furthermore, the CSR projects will focus on providing services and assistance to remote areas and to small islands, and on managing natural resources that support power generation.

(Carol Orlido)

You must welcome change as the rule but not as your ruler.

Denis Waitley