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# Indigenous People Share Stories Of Human Rights Violations At U.N. Consultation

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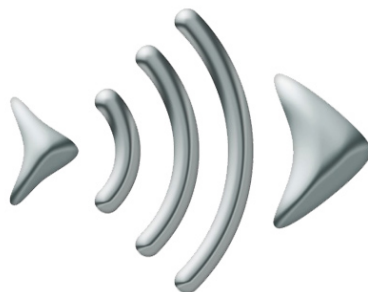
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Santican, of the indigenous Pala'wan tribe in Sibangan, on Bugsuk Island, told a recent United Nations consultation on indigenous people that security personnel of Jewelmer International Corporation's pearl farm have prohibited his community from fishing between Bugsuk and nearby Pandanan Island since the operation began in 1981. Bugsuk is 580 kilometers southwest of Manila.

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"We are forbidden to fish. The company says we disturb the pearl-bearing oysters," Santican told the U.N. consultation of [120 delegates](#), including Church people. He told delegates about guards armed with rifles who catch Pala'wan people fishing, "throw our nets and fish away and get our *banca* (small boats)." The guards "detain our children and make them sleep in their wet clothes in the security headquarters," the tribal leader reported.

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Santican, 46, is area leader of the 600-member NGO *SAMBILOG* (one circle). The name is an acronym for an association of indigenous and small fishermen in Palawan province's far south. Its members are Pala'wan and indigenous Molbog.

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SAMBILOG leaders were among the delegates to the Feb. 2-3 consultation with [Rodolfo Stavenhagen](#), U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous Peoples, at the University of the

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At the meeting, Santican said Jewelmer is owned by Filipino businessman Eduardo Cojuangco Jr. The company claims to be the only Philippine South Sea pearl producer that exhibits in major jewelry fairs worldwide.

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Its farm spans 9,860 hectares of traditional fishing grounds for the Molbog and Pala'wan, said Congresswoman Ana Theresia Baraquel of the party-list organization *Akbayan*, which took up the communities' cause in Congress.



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Companies often employ armed guards in indigenous communities. Some private armies enjoy police privileges, delegates reported.



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Vivian Balingit, of the Subanon tribe, told the consultation four armed men from Canadian mining subsidiary TVI Resource Development Philippines threatened to shoot her and her family, for walking on a private road in Siocon, Mindanao, on Jan. 30, instead of going through a forest. Mindanao is the southern Philippine region.



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One of them even pressed his gun first on her stomach, then her right shoulder, and then on her right temple, she related. Another man shoved her husband to the ground. When she reported the incident to the police, they would not register her complaint on the blotter.

Siocon Subanon Association, headed by Balingit's father, believes the mining company maintains its Civilian Armed Auxiliary to protect its operations

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On the consultation's last day, Stavenhagen recommended that the Philippine government investigate human-rights abuses, resolve land-rights issues, and provide "adequate basic social services" to indigenous communities.

Private groups also updated the U.N. official on Feb. 2 regarding their efforts on behalf of indigenous peoples. Lawyer Sedfrey Candelaria reported for the Assisi Development Foundation, an NGO established in 1975 to rehabilitate communities affected by armed conflict. The foundation is a member of the Church-based *Tabang Mindanaw* (help Mindanao) task force.

Its legal-assistance program conducted a baseline study analyzing indigenous peoples' detention rates in 2006. It found 574 of them jailed nationwide for alleged cattle rustling, kidnapping, homicide, robbery and other crimes.

Candelaria suggested that the Catholic bishops' commission on indigenous peoples set up desks in indigenous communities, through which the Assisi program could deliver legal aid and train paralegal workers. The lawyer also directs programs of the *Katutubo* (tribal) Desk of the Jesuit-run Ateneo Human Rights Center.

Seven Philippine NGOs serving indigenous peoples organized the consultation. *Tebtebba*, a Baguio City-based international center for policy research on indigenous people, estimates that as



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