

Balingasag, Misamis Oriental, Philippines
Report on Interfaith Peace Blessing Ceremony
August 4, 2012
Chung Sik Yong

1400 Higa-onon Tribal Couples in Northern Mindanao Participate in Historic Blessing Ceremony

With around 200 days before Foundation Day, on August 4, 2012, a historic Blessing for the Higa-onon tribe of Mindanao was held in Balingasag town in Misamis Oriental, Northern Mindanao. Some 4,500 people including around 1,400 married couples garbed in their red intricately designed traditional costumes trooped their way to the gymnasium of Balingasag town amidst the heat of the sun, coming from all directions. Motivated by the commitment to fulfill the Special Direction given by the True Parents since last year for all Blessed families and tribal messiahs to educate and bless 13 thousand people, Philippines had conducted series of large scale Blessing events, starting in Sultan Kudarat (35 thousand people, 24,000 couples), Tacloban City (1,200 couples), Dumaguete City (3,000 couples) and with Higa-onon tribe (1,400 couples).



After their chieftains' participation in the Interfaith Peace Blessing Festival in Sultan Kudarat in Mindanao, the Datu Lolong Higa-onon tribe pledged to organize 1,200-couple Blessing for their members. Since late May this year, Divine Principle seminars were conducted in a humble Training Hall that was built through the partnership of UPF and the Datu lolong group. Dr. Chung Sik Yong, the Regional President of UPF Asia, after his meeting with the main tribal leaders of the Higa-onon determined to help build a Training center since he believed in the primary role of education for the tribal people through the Divine Principle. Since then, every week, a 3-Day Divine Principle and Blessing seminars were held and it continued until the end of July and successfully educated around 2,000 participants all belonging to the Higa-onon tribe.



The Higa-onon tribe, one of the "lumads" or indigenous tribes of Mindanao in the Philippines has an estimated 1.8 million members scattered around the provinces of Misamis Oriental, Bukidnon, Agusan Del Norte, Agusan Del Sur and Lanao Del Norte. They are often referred to as the people of the living mountain or sometimes called the "weavers of peace".

Their leader Datu Lolong, Dencio Lipiahan, Sr. the Chairman of the Higa-onon Tribal Community Federation was also recently appointed by the UPF Philippines as Chairman of UPF for the Higa-onons. Datu Lolong attended a 7-Day Original Substance of the Divine Principle (OSDP) Workshop held in Sultan Kudarat Provincial Capitol July of last year and since then had considered the Divine Principle as the teachings that can re-educate all Higa-onons without losing but in fact strengthening their identity. He testified that Divine Principle is like a modern day revelation that is so much related with the customary laws observed by the Higa-onons since ancient times.

The Holy Wine Ceremony was then conducted and officiated by the elder couples of Unification Church lead by Dr. and Mrs. Jaime Vergara. It was a moving moment as the Higa-onon couples solemnly received the Holy Wine in tearful prayers.



The main Blessing Ceremony started with Rev. Julius B. Malicdem, the Philippine national leader as the master of ceremonies. The Harmony Water Ceremony and Interreligious Prayer followed with representatives from different faiths and traditions.



This was followed by the Welcome Address from the Mayor of the Municipality of Balingasag, Hon. Alexis Quina, who was represented by Hon. Ramonito Saarenas, a Municipal councilor.

Dr. and Mrs. Chung Sik Yong, the Regional President of UPF in Asia, officiated the ceremony in behalf of the True Parents and were assisted by 12 attendant couples. You can feel the seriousness of the Higa-onon couples during the course of the ceremony.

The Higa-onons have a traditional belief about purity before marriage and the sanctification of their marriage through God. They call this the "golden wedding". Going through the ceremony was like a journey for these Higa-onon couples. During the Affirmation of Blessing Vows, the participants made the whole gymnasium tremble with their loud shout of "Yes!". As was the case in Dumaguete City Blessing, the 11-minute Benediction Prayer of True Father in the Blessing event in Korea was aired and a translation in the Visayan dialect was simultaneously aired through the public address system. .



After the Blessing ceremony was proclaimed, the newly Blessed couples embraced and kissed as they are serenaded in a Congratulatory song rendered by the singing duo from Cagayan de Oro City. This was followed by a Congratulatory Message from Hon. Sultan Pax Mangudadatu, the Chairman of UPF Mindanao and the host of the first Interfaith Peace Blessing Festival held in Sultan Kudarat. He once again testified about the greatness of True Parents and their vision to unite all people from various faiths and traditions. He stressed the importance of education as a great

equalizer and the solution in order to finally bring peace in Mindanao as he lauded UPF for supporting the cause of the Higa-onons.



Datu Lolong, Dencio Lipiahan, Sr. then gave his closing message thanking the UPF for all the support extended to them especially how UPF is helping them alleviate the awareness of the Higaonons on their identity through the Divine Principle education.



To conclude the victorious ceremony, three cheers of eog mansei “mabuhay” was made that reverberated all over the center of Balingasag signaling that another historic victory was offered for God and True Parents of Heaven, Earth and Humankind.

The leader of the Unification Church in Mindanao, Ms. Almera Grace Mayo working side by side with leaders from the National Headquarters and local leaders truly worked hard in order to be self-reliant in supporting the event. Some Ambassadors for Peace like Retired Major General Alfredo Cayton, Jr., who was born in the town of Balingasag, extended a lot of support which led to the successful staging of the Blessing.



At around 2PM, a pre-program before the Blessing was held with video presentations on the Blessing events and followed by a lecture presentation on pure love which was given by Prof. Celestino JoseV. Navalta, Jr. This was followed by a recitation of the Pure Love pledge by the participants highlighting the students and the young people of the Higa-onons. Then, Pastor Felomino Josol, leader of the Unification Church in Northern Mindanao, who also conducted all the series of 3-day Divine Principle seminars, gave a short but powerful lecture in the local dialect on the significance of the Blessing and the procedure for the Holy Wine Ceremony.



Truly, we are now in the era of group witnessing. The tremendous response from the Higa-onons has opened a great opportunity for witnessing to the indigenous tribes in the Philippines, like the Subanons, Manobos, Tibolis, Mamanwas, and others. After the Blessing program, Dr. Chung Sik Yong and Philippine leaders had a meeting with the Chieftains of the Higa-onons to celebrate the victory of the event and after the challenge from Dr. Yong, they made a determination to conduct 12,000 couples Blessing by May next year. Follow-up education is also underway to educate the couples further regarding church traditions and to go through the process of completing the Blessing. Also, the Higa-onon leaders will prepare and select 120 High School graduates belonging from their tribe to undergo training in order to select 40 qualified students who can pursue their studies in our school, International Peace Leadership College (IPLC) by June 2013. Their vision is very clear that their ultimate goal is to educate 1.8 million Higa-onons with True Parents teachings as their leader Datu Lolong professed, Rev. and Mrs. Moon are truly the Messiah, the True Parents.

The determination of the Philippine leaders and members, the Blessed central families and tribal messiahs was again strengthened as another miracle unfolded in the Higa-onon Tribe Blessing. Members who are either in the frontline as well as those who are one in prayers and support made another step in creating a condition of unity to fulfill the will of the True Parents leading towards Foundation day.

