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'IPs should not be squatters in own lands'

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ITOGON, Benguet: Mayor Victorio Palangdan underscored that Indigenous Peoples (IPs) should not be treated by the government as squatters in their own lands because of the existing land classifications under existing laws, rules and regulations.

Palangdan, who is one of the aspirants for the province's lone congressional post, pointed out that under the current setup, IPs are already considered as squatters in the lands that had been passed on to them by their ancestors because their current abodes are classified as protected lands, watersheds, timberlands.

He observed that the "patented mining claims of large-scale mining companies have deprived them [the IPs] the right to acquire titles to the piece of the property despite having lived in the said areas for decades."

He claimed that there is a need to reclassify the land use to allow IPs ownership and prevent the government from treating them as squatters in the lands they inherited from their ancestors or own through various means.

"There is nothing wrong in the efforts of the government to preserve and protect the environment because of its established benefits to humanity, but there is also a need to strike a balance between protecting the environment and the actual use of the areas where IPs are mostly residing as they can co-exist with nature as evidenced by the decades of their stay in such places," he added.

Palangdan said the IPs know and understand the importance of preserving and protecting the environment and the government must reward them with the legal ownership of the land that they have traditionally occupied.

"The IPs deserve to be rewarded as stewards of the environment, especially the protected, forest reservations, watershed, timberlands and patented mining claims, without unduly damaging these, thus, they deserve to be the partners of government in environmental preservation and protection," he noted.

Palangdan revealed that one of his priority legislations, when given by the people of Benguet the chance to be the representative of the province to the House of Representatives, is for the immediate reclassification of the lands within protected areas, forest reservations, watersheds, timberlands and patented mining claims to conform with the actual use of the land.

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