



**OUR RESPECTIVE INDIGENOUS NAMES ARE LAKAN SUMULONG & LAKAMBINI MAPAYAPA**

We, *Luis Daniel Alba Pantoja* and *Joji Felicitas Francisco Bautista-Pantoja*, are from the Tagalog tribe of Southern Luzon, the region where Manila is located. We lead a peace and reconciliation team who works among the various armed-conflicted parts of the Philippines. We are currently based in Davao City, Mindanao, Philippines.

The Spanish colonial powers almost erased our Tagalog tribal identity and gave us the names of our former colonial masters. The American colonial power converted us into Protestants and made a big gap between our parental families and the Catholic majority members of the clan.

Our Tagalog tribe was used by the Spanish and American colonial powers in their wars to fight against the tribes of Mindanao—both the Islamized and non-Islamized Indigenous Peoples. The Tagalog language was eventually imposed as the Filipino national language throughout the archipelago, ignoring the varying concerns, and later resentment, of other Indigenous Peoples.

One of the most respected tribal leaders in Mindanao and a fellow peacebuilding leader, *Datu Migketay Saway*, advised us to consider using our Tagalog indigenous names as we interact with Indigenous Peoples to bridge the cultural and historical divide between our Westernized tribe and the still relatively preserved Indigenous Peoples of Mindanao.

We went to our Tagalog elders and requested for indigenous names. I was given the name *Lakan Sumulong*—"a proponent of progress." Joji was given the name *Lakambini Mapayapa*—"a woman of peace." Now, our awareness and appreciation of our Tagalog cultural identity is getting deeper. This somehow opened our hearts and minds wider as we continue to seek deeper relationships with the Indigenous Peoples of Mindanao. This aspect of our journey are reconciling and healing factors as we deal with the wounds of the past violent conflicts between the mostly Westernized peoples of Luzon and the Indigenous Peoples of Mindanao.

Meanwhile, our Tagalog elders appreciate that we identify with our Laguna-based culture, yet willing to engage with other Indigenous Peoples of the Philippines to advance peace and reconciliation.

This also helps us and our peacebuilders community as we establish Peace and Reconciliation Communities in many conflicted areas in the Philippines.

More and more, we are seeing the different provinces of the Philippines as an archipelago of various *nations* (ethnei) which is the biblical, respectful way of looking at ethno-linguistic groups.

Although we have been trained, through our colonial educational system, to ignore and even to forget our tribal identities, we are now realizing that our indigenous identities can be a redeeming factor—in healing our *being* (the process of our psycho-spiritual transformation); in determining the priorities of what we ought to be *doing* as a nation (active non-violent radical transformation); and, in determining how we will prioritize what we will be *having* (inclusive growth and national development based on peace-and-reconciliation principles).

Peace and reconciliation seem to be advancing in the Philippines as the Spirit of God continues to transform us and our small community so we can be a transforming presence of Christ in this beautiful but still conflicted land.

*Lakan*

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