

INDIGENOUS ALLIANCE STRENGTHENS GOVERNANCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN THE VICTORIA ANEPAHAN MOUNTAIN RANGE



Indigenous Peoples (IPs) living in and around the Victoria Anepahan Mountain Range (VAMR) in Palawan, Philippines, are strengthening their collective role in protecting their ancestral forests and shaping the future governance of the landscape. In 2025, representatives from several Indigenous communities formed the VAMR Indigenous Peoples Alliance, creating a platform to coordinate conservation efforts and advocate for Indigenous-led stewardship of the mountain range.

As part of this effort, the alliance recently organised a dialogue with environmental enforcement units from the Provincial Government of Palawan and the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD). The meeting aimed to strengthen cooperation between Indigenous communities and government agencies responsible for enforcing environmental laws in Palawan.

STRENGTHENING COOPERATION ON ENVIRONMENTAL LAW ENFORCEMENT

During the dialogue, government representatives explained how environmental enforcement operations are coordinated between the provincial government and PCSD, including logistical and legal support mechanisms. Participants explored how Indigenous communities can play a more active role in monitoring and reporting environmental violations such as illegal logging, wildlife poaching and land encroachment. Authorities encouraged communities to provide reliable information and shared hotline numbers and social media channels to facilitate reporting.

EXPANDING THE ALLIANCE

The meeting also strengthened the alliance itself. Members agreed to expand participation by inviting Indigenous communities from additional villages to join future meetings, further strengthening Indigenous collaboration across the VAMR landscape.

At the same time, the alliance and civil society partners are discussing options for landscape-level governance of the Victoria Anepahan Mountain Range. These discussions have gained urgency as the provincial government and PCSD are considering placing the area under a government-led management regime, such as a protected area under the National Integrated Protected Area System (NIPAS) Law or designation as a Critical Habitat under Palawan's Strategic Environmental Plan (SEP) Law.

While these mechanisms could strengthen conservation, Indigenous communities have raised concerns that their rights under the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) could be weakened if their role in governance becomes limited, despite the landscape being widely recognised as an ancestral domain.

TOWARDS AN INDIGENOUS-LED MANAGEMENT MODEL

Civil society organisations therefore convened to explore governance options that ensure Indigenous leadership remains central. Legal experts and partners shared lessons from past conservation initiatives and discussed pathways towards a more inclusive governance model. A key proposal emerging from the discussions is an Indigenous peoples-led management approach, supported by government institutions and civil society.

Participating organisations agreed to advance this model as a shared advocacy agenda, working towards conservation solutions in the Victoria Anepahan Mountain Range that strengthen both biodiversity protection and Indigenous rights.



Indigenous Peoples Communities and

Environmental Legal Assistance Center (ELAC)

NTFP-EP PHILIPPINES

IUCN National Committee of The Netherlands

In Cooperation with

PCSD

Katala Foundation

Matripal

Centre for Sustainability

WELCOME DELEGATES TO:

VICTORIA ANEPAHAN MOUNTAIN RANGE (VAMR) BIODIVERSITY STOCKTAKING CONFERENCE

24 March 2026 @ AA Plaza Hotel, Puerto Princesa City Palawan

With Support from:

Forest Foundation Philippines

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This work is supported through a Darwin Initiative project implemented by partners including the Environmental Legal Assistance Center (ELAC), the Institute for the Development of Educational and Ecological Alternatives (IDEAS), NTFP-EP Philippines and IUCN NL, aimed at strengthening Indigenous governance and biodiversity protection in two Key Biodiversity areas in Palawan. Through the project, partners are working with Indigenous communities to strengthen their capacity, coordination and voice in forest governance processes, ensuring that conservation efforts in VAMR protect biodiversity while recognising and reinforcing Indigenous rights, knowledge and leadership.