

Tourism in the Philippines: A View from the Underside ***An Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism Consultation***

21 - 23 October 2008

NCCP Ecumenical Center, Quezon City, M.M, Philippines

I. Background and Rationale

The Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism (ECOT, formerly the Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism) and Peace for Life (PFL) are two groups of different advocacies. ECOT, established in 1982 as an outcome of a workshop (held in Manila in 1980) that tried to analyse the effect of tourism on Third World people, has since established itself as a coalition of secular and faith-based groups that “seeks to unite people around collective efforts that negate the undesirable effects of modern tourism and, in its place, institute socially responsible and ethically oriented tourism.” PFL on the other hand is an initiative of faith-based groups dedicated to building people’s solidarity and mobilising resistance to empire; it came about in response to the US-led ‘war on terror’ and its twin hegemonic project referred to as globalisation—that is the integration of the entire world into a global economy within the rubric of unregulated capitalism, or the freedom of capital to move anywhere in pursuit of highest return. They have, however, decided to come together for a consultation with various Philippine groups on the subject of tourism.

A. Contextual Framework

The idea for a Philippine consultation came out of a felt need to revisit the issues that made necessary the establishment of ECOT as an advocacy group on tourism in view of some very serious concerns that have come to prominence in the last couple of decades, not the least of them is the transformation of mass tourism into one of the world’s biggest and fastest growing industries, and one which is now being touted as an essential development thrust to deliver impoverished nations to heights of prosperity. The 21st century is becoming characterised by developing countries on the offensive of out-hyping each other in offering their respective paradises as the ultimate destination for the pleasure/adventure seeking tourists with foreign currencies to spare.

This new collaboration offers an opportunity to widen analyses of issues and provide added perspective for the enrichment of each other’s advocacies, the effective application of which is to be able to identify and pay close attention to the intersections of concerns that could broaden the areas of solidarity and activism. This is particularly relevant given the growing popular consciousness on critical issues like climate change; depletion of fossil fuels and mineral resources and the attendant race for control of what remains of these; food and water shortages; erosion of cultural-social bonds and ethnic identities; religious extremism; and the obscene distribution of wealth, income, and power, all of which have more than mere tangential relevance to PFL’s and ECOT’s objectives.

So what about global tourism? And why should the world social justice movement subject it to close scrutiny?

Current discourse on tourism puts it among the most essential activities and the simplest route for poor countries to provide employment, for communities to benefit from direct North-South income transfer. Charged with politically-correct terminologies—sustainability, corporate social responsibility, peace-building, community-based ecotourism—the push for tourism development is being presented as the ultimate solution to some of the world’s biggest problems, poverty among them.

Leading international agencies (e.g., the World Bank, UN World Tourism Organisation, the International Monetary Fund) along with business organisations are pushing countries around the world to make tourism into a truly global industry. In direct language, this translates into pressuring governments to open up service industries to unrestricted access by multinational big businesses and minimal domestic supervision. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) has already within its auspices GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services) and TRIMs (Trade-Related Investment Measures) geared for the total liberalisation of, among other activities, the tourism industry worldwide. Under these two instruments, services, including utilities will need to be opened up to international capital.

Arguably, there are areas where resident communities have reaped considerable financial benefits, even windfall, from mass tourism. This explains why many local governments and certain communities are enthusiastic about transforming their little known islands and exotic hideaways into tourist hubs.

Tourism, however, is much more complex than most economic activities in the way it touches so many aspects of life, and in the way it can affect, perhaps irreversibly, environment, resource allocation, people, social structures and ethos. Tourism is big business with colonial roots, and it maintains the same unequal trading relationships, dependencies, and division of labour that characterise global capitalism, with the added dimension of overtly commodifying everything—natural resources and ecosystems, national patrimony, cultural heritage—for short-term gains.

A big predicament that faces the socially concerned is the certainty that mass tourism, sustainable or not, is here to stay and is bound to get even bigger and widespread at least in the next several decades. So much is at stake in allowing multinational big business and capital-subservient governments to have a free hand in tourism development. It is imperative that people are made aware of what the stakes are so countermeasures may be undertaken. Education, vigilance and activism are still the best weapons there are.

B. Philippine Tourism

Like most governments of the world's non-industrialised economies that subscribe to the idea that integration with the global economy through privatisation and liberalisation is the only way for a country to develop, the Arroyo government puts a premium on tourism to generate income and employment for the Philippine's ever expanding population. The Department of Tourism (DOT) reports that 3.09 million tourists in 2007 resulted in total receipts of US\$4.9 billion (about four per cent of the country's GDP), a growth 8.7 percent over the previous year and ranking sixth among the most visited of the ASEAN member countries. The target for 2008 is US\$5.8 billion.

On 11 June 2008 the Philippine Senate passed the Tourism Act of 2008 “declaring a national policy for tourism as an engine of investment, employment, growth and national development.” The idea is to cash in on the “booming global industry” and play catch-up with the regions leading destinations, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. The bill promises a tourism policy that “will promote a focused, sustainable, responsible and participative culture of tourism that is ecologically and culturally sensitive, economically viable, and ethically and socially equitable for local communities.”

Elaborate safeguards and assurances for residents of prospective development areas notwithstanding, organised communities and organisations are sceptical, even fearful, of the effect of massive tourism development on the livelihood of people and on the environment. From experience, the opening up of certain spots as tourist havens have resulted in displacements with attendant loss of livelihood; the reclassification of agricultural lands for land reform into golf courses; banishment of fisherfolks from their traditional fishing grounds; indigenous population dispossessed ancestral lands in favour of ecotourism.

There is also the ever growing concern that tourism brings with it sexual trafficking of children. Studies have shown that the Philippines ranks fourth among nine nations with most children in prostitution—estimated to be between 60,000 to 100,000. The top five areas for prostitution and sex tourism are Metro Manila, Angeles City, Puerto Galera in Mindoro, Davao, and Cebu.

Medical tourism, a recent project of the Department of Health, is another area which is getting a lot of criticism from groups within the social justice movement. The Council of Health and Development, a non-government community health programme, considers the focus on medical tourism as “a sell-out of the country’s health care system to foreign big business that spells government abandonment of its responsibility to provide much needed health services to the people.”

C. Solidarity Tourism

Travel and exchanges in itself can bring about better understanding people’s issues and struggles. Referred to as solidarity or justice tourism, it is an integral part of activism with much potential for drawing in people to be part of a dynamic social force that can promote social, political, and environmental changes.

II. Objectives

- Present a comprehensive analysis of global tourism as it is developing viewed within the framework of social and environmental justice;
- Highlight focal areas for advocacy and activism and lay the groundwork for further initiatives;
- Analyze the Philippine Tourism Act of 2008 and identify areas and methods of intervention;
- Come up with a plan to develop solidarity tourism in the Philippines as part of Philippine participating groups’ advocacy and education activities; and
- Draw up concrete proposals for cooperation between ECOT and the participating organisations.

III. Programme Format, Participants and Resource Persons

Peace for Life leads the working group that to prepare, coordinate, and implement the plans for the Consultation. Members of the working group are the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, IBON Foundation, and CONTAK Philippines.

The Consultation will have testimonies of the women, children, indigenous peoples, environment activists, health practitioners, and church workers on the effects of tourism in their lives and communities. The Consultation will discuss alternative ways of “tourism” practiced by people’s organisations and institutions in the Philippines.

Workshop groups will analyse and critique the Philippine Tourism Act of 2008, the output of which will form part of the “people’s appraisal” for possible submission to the Sixth International Tourism Forum for Parliamentarians and Local Authorities sponsored by the United Nations World Tourism Organization which will be held in Cebu on 22-25 October 2008.

Around 20-25 participants coming from the following organisations will be invited (list of tentative participants):

1. Center for Women Resource
2. ISIS International-Manila
3. Salinlahi Alliance for Children’s Concerns
4. Indigenous Peoples Rights Monitor
5. Tabak National Minority Resource Center
6. Tambuyog Development Center
7. Center for Environmental Concerns

8. KALIKASAN – Philippine Environmental NGO Network
9. Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement
10. Council for Health and Development
11. Concerned Artists of the Philippines
12. CONTAK Philippines
13. National Council of Church in the Philippines
14. Kapatirang Simbahan Para sa Bayan (KASIMBAYAN)
15. Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines
16. Southern Tagalog People’s Resource Center
17. Solidarity of People’s Action Network
18. Advocate of Philippine Fair Trade, Inc
19. University of the Philippines-Asian Institute of Tourism
20. Alternate Forum for Research in Mindanao
21. InPeace Mindanao

IV. Expected Results and Follow-up Activities

- A network that will act as a watchdog of tourism program in the Philippines
- An analysis and critique of the Philippine Tourism Act of 2008
- Compilation of testimonies and research on the impact of tourism prepared by participating organisations
- Consultation statement
- Press releases

V. Schedule

21 October (Tuesday)		
	ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION
8:00	Arrival and Billeting	
8:30	Introduction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. General orientation 2. State of global tourism and ECOT's response
10:00	Break	
10:30	State of Philippine Tourism	Critique of the Philippine tourism policy
12:00	Lunch	
13:30	Sharing & Testimonies	Sharing on the impact of tourism on the basic sectors of the society and testimonies from the victims of militarisation, displacement, sex trafficking brought by tourism. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Peasants 2. Workers 3. Indigenous Peoples

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Women and Children 5. Environment 6. Health 7. Culture and Arts
15:30	Break	
16:00	Case Studies	Impact of tourism on the people and environment
17:30	Break / Announcements	
18:30	Dinner	
20:00	Discussion	
21:00	Rest	

22 October (Wednesday)		
	ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION
7:00	Breakfast	
8:30	Recap & Announcements	
9:15	Theological Reflection	
10:00	Break	
10:30	Solidarity Tourism	Include examples from the workers, women, indigenous peoples and church
11:30	Workshop	
12:30	Lunch	
14:30	Plenary	
16:00	Break	
16:30	Statement Writing	
18:30	Dinner Fellowship	

23 October (Thursday)		
	ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION
10:00	Press Conference	