



Bu-lat-lat (boo-lat-lat) verb: to search, probe, investigate, inquire; to unearth facts

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Preserving Ancient Heritage

Conservationists in Cagayan de Oro felt vindicated while city hall officials got a big slap when the Environment Management Bureau stopped a P600-million road and bridge project to preserve a valuable archeological site.

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Bulatlat.com

CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY – The Heritage Conservation Advocates (HCA) scored a major victory last week in its fight for the preservation and protection of the controversial Huluga archaeological site after as the Environment Management Bureau (EMB) issued a cease-and-desist order against a multimillion-peso road and bridge project in Barangay Indahag here.

In an over 15-page decision, local EMB chief Sabdullah Abubakar ruled in favor of the conservationists, ordering city hall to pay P50 thousand as punishment for the damage it caused the Huluga “open site,” the area where the earliest known residents of the city lived.

Aside from imposing a fine on the local government and ordering a stay to the ongoing road and bridge construction, the EMB also directed city hall to organize two teams—the first would ensure the preservation and conservation of the archaeological site; the second would conduct “salvage archaeology,” and map out and define the entire Huluga archaeological complex.

Based on the EMB order, the team that would take charge of “control management” and ensure that the site is protected, should be created and mobilized in coordination with the National Museum, Department of Tourism (DOT) and the Xavier University-based Research Institute for Mindanao Culture (RIMCU).

EMB also ordered city hall to put in place signboards in strategic places at the archaeological site so the public would know that the place is a heritage site.

Legal and moral victory

“This is a big victory...they (city hall officials) were proven wrong,” said HCA lawyer Manuel Ravanera who fought the administrative case before the EMB on behalf of the conservationists for nearly two months.

HCA co-convenor Antonio Montalvan said the EMB decision “is victory for us all” in that the bureau issued a cease-and-desist order and required the local government and its contractor, UKC Builders Inc., to strictly follow all the conditions in the ECC.

For the conservationists, the EMB decision was a vindication and a big slap to city hall officials who have been justifying—and at times, denying—that the archaeological site was damaged as a result of the over P600-million project.

“We are elated at the news about the EMB decision. But we have yet to meet and plot our next moves,” said Montalvan. “I hope [Mayor Vicente] Emano will comply with it. This has been a painful lesson for him. We are vindicated.”

Environmental activist and HCA member BenCyrus Ellorin described the EMB decision as a “huge legal and moral victory” for the campaign to preserve and protect the archaeological site.

“The campaign has had small moral victories... without a legal victory, our campaign [to save Huluga] won’t be complete,” said Ellorin.

He appealed to Emano and other city hall officials to be “magnanimous in defeat.”

“We can work with them (Emano and other local officials) but we have to follow the law,” said Ellorin.

‘Salvage Archaeology’

A researcher-archaeologist of the National Museum, Clyde Jagoon, has recommended “salvage archaeology” for Huluga. This simply means saving whatever is left of the damaged Huluga “open site,” a place that

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continuously yields, up to this day, non-Filipino volcanic glasses and “ancient trash” that includes animal remains. Near the “open site” are caves that separately yielded parts of ancient tools and a woman’s skull that dates back to 377 AD.

“A mistake has been made,” said Jagoon shortly after he visited the damaged Huluga site. “People need to know that [in building the bridge and road], a mistake has been committed in the process.”

Jagoon also said city hall was informed by the National Museum about the dangers of damaging the Huluga “open site” as early as 2001 contrary to Mayor Emano’s claim that no one questioned the project before or at the early stages of the now nearly completed road and bridge project.

Since the damage has been done, Jagoon suggested that the National Museum and the city government agree and work together to undertake “salvage archaeology” in the area.

There were also proposals to build a museum within the Huluga archaeological complex. **Bulatlat.com**

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