

Message of
HONORABLE ROSALINDA DIMAPILIS-BALDOZ
Secretary, Department of Labor and Employment

**At the Declaration of Child-Labor Free Barangays and Awarding of Equipment for
Livelihood Enhancement, and Distribution of Books, Medicine, and Hygiene Kits**

**(Delivered in Banga-an National High School, Barangay Banga-an Sagada, Mt.
Province on 24 February 2015)**

Hon. Mayor Eduardo T. Latawan;
Hon. Vice Mayor Richard Yodong;
Hon. Members of the Sangguniang Bayan of Sagada;
Brgy. Captain Domingo Kelly of Brgy. Ague;
Brgy. Captain Osenio Lay-os of Brgy. Banga-an;
Brgy. Captain Jojo Briones of Brgy. Fidelisan;
Brgy. Captain Joseph Aclopen of Brgy. Madongo;
Brgy. Miguel Tawagen of Brgy. Pide;
Brgy. Captain Ben Ayawan of Brgy. Tanulong;
Dr. Leonarda 'Onie' Aguinalde, Vice President for Administration of the University of
Cordillera, and Head, Project H.E.L.E.N.;
Dr. Edward Tauli, Member of the Executive Committee of the Philippine Dental
Association-Benguet Chapter;
Esther S. Palao-ay, Municipal Social Welfare and Development Officer;
Nellie Mason, Head of the Crisis Intervention Unit, DSWD; and
Rita Dugno, Officer-in-Charge of the Banga-an National High School, represented by
Ms. Jane Cadalig;
Our dear parents, students, and children:

A pleasant Good morning to all of us.

As I have promised in 12 October 2012, I have returned to Sagada.

With me today is the full force of the Department of Labor and Employment in the
Cordillera Administrative Region, lead by no less than Regional Director Henry John S.
Jalbuena, his Assistant Regional Director Erwin Aquino, TSSD chief Emerito Narag, Mt.
Province Field Office head Samuel Lasdacan, and the regional staff.

Today is a very momentous and a highly-significant day. I am very happy to be here today and to join you to witness the declaration, finally, of six out of 19 barangays of the Municipality of Sagada as child labor-free barangays.

In the two short years since I first visited Sagada, you have achieved what other municipalities around the country are trying to do—and that is to transform their communities into child labor-free communities. For this, let me warmly congratulate Mayor Latawan, Vice Mayor Yodong and his Sangguniang Bayan, as well as all the barangay captains of Aguid, Bangaan, Fidelisan, Madongo, Pide, and Tanulong for a very remarkable feat.

I also congratulate our convergence partners—the Departments of Education, Health, Social Welfare and Development, and Interior and Local Government, National Nutrition Council, the University of the Cordillera and its Project H.E.L.E.N., represented here today by Dr. Onie Aguinalde; Rotary Club of Baguio, and the Philippine Dental Association-Benguet Chapter, represented by Executive Committee Member Dr. Edward Tauli—for holding firm in their commitment to make Mt. Province free of the scourge of child labor.

But of course, I reserve my happiest congratulations to the school teachers, the parents, and their children who made this day happen. I certainly hope your journey with us in making Sagada child-labor free was fulfilling and will endure beyond this celebration.

I came from Baguio City yesterday where I also personally distributed Certificates of Compliance under our reform program, the new Labor Laws Compliance System, or LLCS, to 592 establishments, 19 of which were businesses located inside the Baguio Export Processing Zone, which we have declared to be a Labor Laws Compliance Zone, a Child Labor-Free Zone, and a Productivity-Based Pay Practitioner Zone. The CAR now holds the record of having an export processing zone which has a “three-in-one” compliances. I also awarded these 19 establishments Certificates of Child Labor-Free Establishment, or CLFE, an important component of the LLCS.

From this, you will note how the DOLE attaches so much importance and how it values our children and their future, so much so that even in private businesses, we see to it that no child labourer is employed.

On 18 May, or only a few months before I first visited Sagada on 12 October 2012, we launched the DOLE’s Child Labor-Free Barangay Campaign in Quezon City.

The Child Labor-Free Barangay Campaign is the DOLE’s contribution to President Benigno S. Aquino III’s call to eliminate the scourge of child labor in the country and our contribution to the Philippine Program Against Child Labor, which seeks to eliminate child labor and its worst forms and uplift the lives of children and their families.

The Child Labor-Free Barangay Campaign seeks to deliver the message that the government is serious in its bid to eliminate child labor. The project does not only showcase strategies in successfully freeing barangays from child labor, but also to influence change and identify the roles and commitments of stakeholders—particularly government agencies, non-government organizations, private business, local chief executives, local leaders, parents of child labourers, and the child labourers themselves—that will contribute towards a child-labor free barangay.

Thus, it is the Child Labor Free Barangay Campaign that inspired us to converge with partners to pursue the fight against child labor and make it effective. We realised that the DOLE could not do it alone. Child labor is a persistent societal problem that no single sector can solve, not by the government, or by the private sector.

Here in Sagada, we partnered with your local government and with other national government agencies and private organisations. We partnered with the teachers and we partnered with the parents. We said we should help the parents earn sufficient income so that they will not require their children to work. Children should be in school, not in the farms, or in construction, or in the mines.

I believe that by involving the communities and by bringing down our intervention right in the barangay level and in the enterprise level, we will be able to make a difference.

We have been proven to be right.

For two years in a row since 2013 and for the first time, Philippines has sustained its highest rating in the US Department of Labor Report, “Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor,” as one of 10 countries that has garnered “significant progress” in its fight against the worst forms of child labor.

I would recall that when I first visited Sagada, specifically Barangay Aguid, we delivered the initial assistance of the DOLE under the Child Labor-Free Barangay Campaign to some 120 children and their parents. (We believe we could not go on preaching if we do not practice what we preach.) The assistance was in the form of school supplies to the children under the DOLE’s Project Angel Tree, and financial grants amounting to P1.52 million to jumpstart their parents’ various livelihoods, among them, meat, soya, peanut, and coffee processing, as well as a souvenir shop.

On your part, Mayor Lantawan presented me with Municipal Ordinance No. 05-2012, known as “An Ordinance Providing for Child Survival, Development, Protection, and Participation, and Establishing a Comprehensive Support System in the Municipality of Sagada and for Other Purposes.”

The ordinance is now known as the Sagada Municipal Code of Children, and I would like to believe that you are one of the first 5th class municipalities in the country to adopt such a Code.

Also during my first visit, I got the surprise of my life when the Municipality of Sagada, through Mayor Latawan and the Sangguniang Bayan, honoured me through Sangguniang Bayan Resolution No. 68-2012, as an adopted daughter of Sagada.

I remember very well the cultural rite that followed after my adoption, which was witnessed by Gov. Leonardo Maya-en, Mayor Latawan, Jr., Members of the Sanggunian, and the barangay captains of the six barangays, led by Aguid Barangay Captain Maximo Suyon.

The name conferred on me is “Bang-an”, and Bang-an, your adopted daughter, has returned home to Sagada as I promised.

Regional Director Jalbuena has reported to me that many things have happened after my first visit, and that the local officials of Sagada continue to work with us to sustain the gains that we have achieved in eliminating the worst forms of child labor in our communities.

In Manila, I continued to monitor your progress, and I was elated to know that after you have legislated your Municipal Code of Children, your Sangguniang Bayan has allocated five percent of your annual budget for the implementation of the Code. This is, indeed, commendable.

On our part, the DOLE-CAR, through the Mt. Province Field Office organised the parents of the children to become anti-child labor advocates. The DOLE also continued its Project Angel Tree advocacy by distributing school supplies to the children in partnership with the TSB Foundation and the Saint Louis University Boys, and to monitor the livelihood of the parents which, I was told, were thriving.

I have directed Regional Director Jalbuena, through the DOLE Mt. Province Field Office headed by Samuel Lasdacan, to continue monitoring this progress, and seeing to it that all convergence programs and services are delivered to the parents, as well as to the children until they have graduated from school. There is no turning back now in our effort to free our communities from the scourge of child labor.

I am very glad to know that you have issued your own language version of the “Rights of A Child” and displayed these conspicuously in tourist information areas. Such will help raise the awareness of the people of Sagada, and even tourists themselves, that in your town, you value the rights of our children and, therefore, will not compromise them.

I would like to commend once again the DepEd, one of our major convergent partners, for doing its share of the hard work of keeping Sagada children in school. I have been informed that in the six barangays which we have identified and assisted to become child labor-free, DepEd records show that in 2013, there has been a significant decline in the school drop-out rate, and that last year, there was no more drop-out rate among the identified children. Moreover, all the graduating identified child workers have graduated from high school. My warmest congratulations!

To Chairmen Domingo Kelly, Osenio Lay-os, Jojo Briones, Joseph Aclopen, Miguel Tawagen, and Ben Ayawan of Barangays Aguid, Bangaan, Fidelisan, Madongo, Pide, and Tanulong, respectively:

You may wish to know that your barangays have been classified as belonging to Level 3, or “low-hanging fruits”, where child labor issues have been addressed and various stakeholders have been mobilised for advocacy and service delivery.

Under the convergence program, H.E.L.P. M.E., there are three levels of barangays where our anti-child labor efforts are implemented in varying degrees.

Level 1, the so-called “new frontier,” include barangays that have child laborers in hazardous situations and where initiatives against the practice have not yet been undertaken.

Level 2, or “continuing”, includes barangays where there are child laborers in hazardous situations, but where interventions, initiatives, or services have been undertaken and are continuing, but need enhancements to achieve the goal.

Level 3, the so-called “low-hanging fruits,” are barangays where child labor issues have been addressed and various stakeholders have been mobilized for advocacy and service delivery.

In 2014, our 16 DOLE Regional Offices had targeted 63 “low-hanging fruits” barangays to be certified as child labor-free; 218 “continuing” barangays to be upgraded as “low-hanging fruits” barangays; and 277 “new frontier” barangays to be upgraded as “continuing” barangays.

As of December 2014, a total of 49 barangays have been certified as child labor-free; 231 barangays have been upgraded from “continuing” to “low-hanging fruits”; and 283 “new-frontier” barangays have been upgraded to “continuing” barangays.

Also last year, we have completed our profiling of child labourers nationwide, 75,000 of whom have been identified and in which barangays. Most of the child laborers profiled were engaged in farming, fishing, scavenging, vending, small-scale mining and domestic work, among others.

It is for these reasons that I would like to express to you my gratitude and sincere thanks for coming up with your respective barangay resolutions declaring your barangays “Child Labor-Free Barangays in 2014. This makes your barangays ready to be declared as child labor-free barangays for meeting the indicators we have set for a barangay to be declared child labor-free. These indicators are the following:

- no child below 15 years old works, unless in two circumstances provided under the Child Labor Law

- no child 15-17 years old is engaged in the worst forms of child labor
- all children of school age are attending formal school or alternative learning session
- parents have economic activity to support the needs of their children
- presence of a functional barangay council for the protection of children
- implementation of local ordinances or resolutions to address child labor concerns.
- reports of child labor incidence immediately acted or resolved
- child labor issues and concerns are mainstreamed in local development plans

Over and above these indicators, I appreciate further that last year, the teachers, parents, and local barangay officials in all the six identified barangays have signed individual commitment to action to attain a child labor-free barangay, and to protect children from all forms of abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation, and discrimination prejudicial to their development.

Your commitment to establish a functional information system on child labor; institutionalise and strengthen partnership; provide access to services; mainstream child labor agenda; conduct advocacy activities; and strengthen enforcement and compliance to anti-child labor laws is what brought us here today in this gathering.

Because you have performed your roles well, we now have six barangays in Sagada that are child labor-free, and I declare them so today.

I direct Regional Director Jalbuena to work with Mayor Latawan and the six barangay captains so that in proper time, markers which declare these barangays child labor-free can be erected in a conspicuous place in each barangay for all Sagada residents and visitors to see.

With six barangays in Sagada already child labor-free, the DOLE-CAR has already more than exceeded its target of declaring five barangays in the “low hanging fruits” category as child labor-free in 2014. The DOLE-CAR’s target for 2015 is also five barangays in the “low hanging” category; six barangays in the “continuing” category; and nine barangays in the “new frontier”. Congratulations to DOLE-CAR!

This year, I am excited to know that the DOLE-CAR has strengthened further its partnership with the DOH, National Nutrition Council, DSWD, Philippine Dental Association-Benguet Chapter, and the University of the Cordilleras through its Project H.E.L.E.N. in deepening the Child Labor-Free Barangay Campaign in Sagada.

These institutions and organisations are here again today to help us. They brought with them medicines, multi-vitamins, dental hygiene kits; family food packs consisting of rice, canned goods, noodles, coffee, and chocolates; and books and journals. These are for the children so they will not feel heavily burdened by the chores of school work—not child work.

To the parents, the DOLE-CAR is also delivering its livelihood enhancement package of P994,645 for the meat processing project of the parents in Brgy. Agued, P248,785; T-shirt printing of the parents here in Brgy. Banga-an, P298,470; soya milk production of the parents in Brgy. Fidelisan, P198,725; and peanut butter production of the parents in Brgy. Fide, P248,725.

With these assistance, it is my sincere hope that the parents will continue to support the Child Labor-Free Barangay Campaign as it moves purposely and firmly, not only in Sagada, but also in many parts of the Philippines. I will certainly share your success with others so that they will be inspired to also achieve what you have accomplished.

Once again, good morning to all of us. God bless.

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