I lost my father in 1999. He was leading our tribe then. As a leader myself, I took my father's place in the council of elders and began to take the struggle to assert our rights, territories, culture and tradition.

I lost my left leg in 2000. My work as a leader even became more challenging and full of sacrifices. I have to walk on artificial leg to perform my duties.

In 2006, we created the Dulangan Unified Ancestral Domain claim covering eight (8) barangays in the municipalities of Opol and Manticao in the Province of Misamis Oriental. As a Unified Domain, we asserted our rights over our territories, to protect it and develop it. We asked for free prior informed consent (FPIC) whenever outside entities want to engage us or our resources like mining.

By 2008, we realized that mining was harmful to the environment and especially to our food source, and is dividing our community. We decided not to accept them further despite offer of bribes and other perks. The council stands united. My life and of others were threatened since then, with significant bounties on our heads.

I lost my right leg in 2009, and have been a leader in a wheelchair since then. I asked my council to accept my resignation twice. They refused. I was nominated as one of the Bayaning Filipino (Filipino heroes) by the Ugat Foundation and ABS-CBN's at the regional level and ended in top 5 in the whole Philippines. I became the Municipal Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative in 2013.

Our leadership was tested even more when another mining company wants to explore our land. Blackstone Mineral Resources Corporation applied for mining exploration and was granted by the government. Pressures from all sides lead us to negotiate for acceptable terms which was incorporated in the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). The company complied with the terms including a two year only exploration activities. The council was united in asserting that the more we open our territory to the mining companies, the more our forest, our food our water source, our cultural life will be threatened.

Our struggle now is the completion of the titling of our land. We believe that exercising our governance in our territory, however difficult it will be, is an assurance for our identity and food security. Our indigenous knowledge systems and practices and governance mechanisms since time immemorial, significantly delayed the total destruction of our natural resources, our source of food, our source of life.

… Example of traditional governance to ensure food security

We our open to modern development, and we are open to solidarity. But our strength in solidarity with others should further our empowerment in the exercise of our rights, cultures and traditions.

Thank for the opportunity to share, and for listening to our distinct experience.