

Council maps 251 communities of indigenous people

Project aimed at charting territories, borders of some 600 aborigine settlements islandwide

2004-11-13 / Taiwan News, Staff Reporter / By Hungfu Hsueh

The Council of Indigenous Peoples announced that out of approximately 600 aboriginal communities in the country, mapping of 251 has been finalized, and around 200 more areas are nearing its completion.

Approximately 200 villages have not yet started creating their own tribal maps.

An official of the CIP, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that the project still lacked funding, as the central government had only allocated NT\$4 million per year.

President Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) praised the tribal leaders and tribesmen for their efforts to complete the 251 tribal maps, in the latest edition of "Abian's Electronic Newspaper."

"The completion of these tribal maps is proof of the successful cooperation between the government and the aboriginal people. It is also an exemplification of the 'new partnership' formed between the two sides," Chen said in the newsletter.

The "new partnership" mentioned is part of a promise and commitment to the aboriginal people made by Chen during his 2000 election campaign.

Chen, at that time, vowed that his government would recognize the indigenous rights of the aboriginal people, and promised to cultivate an equal-treatment relationship, unlike that of a subject-ruler relationship employed in the past.

The project, started three years ago, aims at mapping the territories and specifying the borders of each tribe.

The initiative's cultural significance is seen as providing information on hunting grounds, sacred spots and centers of economic activities.

On top of all these, this endeavor would serve as the basis for the implementation of future aboriginal autonomy, where each tribe's encompassed area would be defined by the completed map.

Senior leaders of tribes were on-hand to guide the mapmakers at each step of the way.

In addition to this, tribesmen were also required to undertake basic cartographic training to carry out this project.

All maps were produced exclusively through the efforts of the tribesmen.

"Lack of manpower in each tribe is also a major difficulty for us," the CIP official revealed. "The map-making process requires senior tribal leaders to guide their people to multiple sites to properly document the data. Some leaders are simply too old to undertake such a gruelling task."

Chen wrote a short essay in his newsletter to elaborate his personal involvement in the Aboriginal Territory

Exploration Conference in southern Taiwan, Pingtung on October 30.

"The production of the tribal maps means that the government is willing to respect and understand the perspectives of aboriginal people. More importantly, it exhibits that the government respects the aboriginal people's choices and decisions," Chen commented.

The president also re-emphasized his "new partnership" commitment by saying that he hopes to dedicate one chapter in the future Constitution to safeguarding the rights of the aboriginal people.

"(The chapter in the Constitution will) aim to preserve the culture and tradition of the aboriginal people, and protect their integrity and sovereignty - and these tribal maps will pave the way for achieving all of these goals," the president declared